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Aspiring example to the world

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BY PAUL GABRIEL

AS MALAYSIANS salute Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's contributions, the foreign diplomatic corps have also been caught in the swirl of the Prime Minister's retirement sweeping across the nation.

Foreign heads of mission sent their countries' and peoples' wishes for Malaysia's statesman. Others, seeing the occasion as "too big," left the tributes to their respective national leaders.

Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Kenyan Ambassador James Karuga, in leading the accolades, said Dr Mahathir had rendered remarkable service to Malaysia, adding that Malaysians would continue to enjoy the fruits of his labour long after his departure.

"He has been a friend and ally of the developing world and throughout his term we have witnessed his willingness to assist and contribute extensively towards our better understanding.

"There is no doubt that his views on issues of international importance have remained candid and reflective of the real situation in our world today," he added.

Sri Lankan High Commissioner Rosy Senanayake, among the first to pen a farewell note, sent in her Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's remarks as well.

"In my political career, I have had the fortune of meeting many leaders of nations.

Some have made deep and lasting impressions upon me because of their commitment to their people, while others I have admired for their power of conviction and resolve.

"In the case of Dr Mahathir, it has been a unique combination of both these attributes and it is with a sense of sadness that I send this message as he ends his active political career," said Wickremesinghe, who flew in here in September to personally bid farewell to Dr Mahathir.

Senanayake described Dr Mahathir as a true friend of Sri Lanka and "beacon for my country as it regains itself."

"Dr Mahathir has been an example to the entire world. His leadership by example and perseverance in seeing through ideas will be legendary," she added.

Spanish Ambassador Alvaro Iranzo expressed his country's recognition of Dr Mahathir's firm and clairvoyant leadership.

"He has greatly contributed to the making of Malaysia today, a stable, modern and prosperous nation, proud of its culture and positively influential in its region and beyond."

Chinese Ambassador Hu Zhengyue, an admirer of Dr Mahathir, said although 22 years was a short period in history, the prime minister had managed to turn Malaysia into a model developing country.

"The Malaysian people know better how different their lives are now from 22 years ago. Dr Mahathir's achievement, vision and

insights have made him one of the world's greatest statesmen," he added.

On a bilateral level, Hu expressed gratitude to Dr Mahathir for his "fair and objective comments on China". "As PM, he had always pushed our ties forward. The Chinese people will always remember him for his contributions to the bilateral relations."

Cuban Ambassador Pedro Monzon Barata, whose leader Fidel Castro shares a special kinship with Dr Mahathir, expressed predicament in paying his tribute.

"It's really difficult as being such an important personality, his thoughts and deeds are so well known around the world. We are on the side of those who consider Dr Mahathir to be one of the most outstanding and generous leaders of the world in the last and present century.

"There is no doubt that the footprints left by Dr Mahathir transcends his own country," he said.

Indonesia's charge d'affaires Suherman Obon noted: "I have been assigned to Malaysia three times as an Indonesian diplomat and on my observation, Dr Mahathir has been the most proactive and innovative leader.

"He has never been short of ideas in his endeavour to change Malaysia from a developing to a developed nation."

Afghanistan's head of mission, Amanullah Jayhoon, prayed for God to continue to lead and protect Dr Mahathir in his years of retirement.

"He is a precious leader of the Muslim Ummah and though he is leaving his post as PM, he will dwell forever in the hearts of every Malaysian as a successful leader. He is leaving when Malaysia is in a very stable condition."

South African High Commissioner Dr Abraham Sokhaya Nkomo said his country's highest national honours, the Order of the Cape of Good Hope, bestowed on Dr Mahathir in 1997 was a special tribute to his statesmanship even back then.

"He was always imbued with a deep and abiding sense of justice and concern for the marginalised and oppressed, always unstinting in both moral and material support."