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End of a long goodbye

IT has been a long and smooth transition and it finally draws to a close.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad retires as Prime Minister of Malaysia today after more than 22 years, leaving behind a nation that has become a model of well-being and prosperity, civil order and economic development for Asia.

He hands over the reins to the new Prime Minister of Malaysia Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who now has the unenviable task of filling some very huge shoes.

There is, indeed, no denying Dr Mahathir's unique greatness. Yet, throughout his administration, he was an intriguing combination of paradoxes - bashful yet so supreme-

ly confident, outgoing yet aloof, charming yet ruthless, gentle yet aggressive, sentimental yet shrewd, futuristic yet pragmatic and well-grounded.

This enigmatic mix that made up his personality led to controversy but it also contributed to his talent for thinking out of the box, his visionary ideas and his political longevity.

His final months in office bore witness to an outpouring of tributes and emotions for this man who has been such an indelible part of the

Malaysian consciousness.

Everywhere he went, the crowds surged around him like an emotional blanket. People could not seem to get enough of him.

He must have posed for hundreds of photographs with people from all walks of life and even journalists who had covered him all these years were clamouring for opportunities to be photographed with him.

Old photographs of him were reproduced for viewing at exhibitions, reprinted in newspapers and displayed on TV and the Internet.

Many who have followed the pictorial history of this bold and visionary leader have been struck by how he continues to look as dashing as ever.

He has obliged a flood of requests from media organisations here and abroad for special interviews, answering seemingly repetitive questions about his career, his family and, of course, how he intended to spend his retirement after such a consuming political career.

Apart from the bold policies and world-class infrastructure that now

form part of his legacy, Dr Mahathir will ultimately be remembered for creating a nation. He put Malaysia on the global map and gave Malaysians a genuine sense of pride in the country.

For all that and more, we the people have much to thank this man. This special tribute sets out to do just that. It will look back the two decades of his leadership and more. In the process, it will be a journey through a remarkable life that changed millions of other lives.

The Mahathir Era might be ending but his vision, his ideals, his principles and dreams will live on simply because he has made them his people's too. - **by JOCELINE TAN**