

Bequeathed to the people

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Gifts, awards and mementos presented to Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah over the past 22 years are stored and exhibited at Galeria Perdana in Langkawi, making it a veritable national treasure trove, writes ANTHONY TAN.

ONE of the first exhibits to greet visitors at the Galeria Perdana in Langkawi is a huge portrait of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Tourist guides are known to have likened the oil portrait, painted by Hikmat Jalil from Uzbekistan in 1997, to that of the famous Mona Lisa as Dr Mahathir's eyes in the painting seem to "follow" the viewer.

The art piece is among 2,000 to 2,500 exhibits displayed at the RM16mil gallery at any one time.

Comprising two double-storey blocks with a built-up area of 5,332sq m, the gallery, one of the most visited attractions on the island, was set up to house, display and share with the people the various awards, souvenirs and gifts received by Dr Mahathir from world leaders and Malaysians during his tenure as Prime Minister.

There is a section which displays gifts and awards received by Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

The exhibits, Dr Mahathir had said, were not his personal possessions but the property of the people and Government of Malaysia.

These are paintings, musical instruments, ceramics, porcelain pieces, glassware, woodcarvings, pewter, carpets, an ancient revolver, silk, silverware, keris, textiles, crystals, stones, blowpipe, swords, replicas of buildings, a wooden bicycle and cars.

The many portraits of Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah are made from a variety of materials.

There is one made of horse hair using a technique called *suji bian*. Another portrait of the couple was created simply by punching holes on a board.

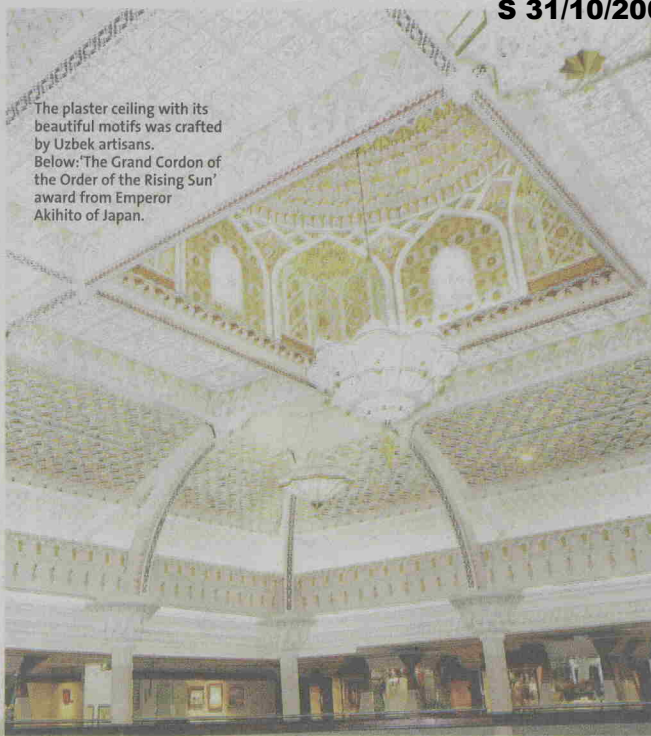
The list of people and countries that presented the gifts and awards are as numerous as the exhibits.

Among the countries are Turkey, Lesotho, Mauritius, China, Japan, Albania, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, India, Lebanon, Iran, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Tunisia and Ghana.

Dr Mahathir, an avid horse rider, had also received quite a number of paintings and statues of horses.

A replica of the Thomas Cup was also presented to Dr Siti Hasmah who is the patron of the Badminton Association of Malaysia.

Also on exhibit are photographs of the couple in their younger days. Dr Mahathir did not always have the clean-shaven look as evident from a photograph of him with a beard and moustache as a young doctor in Langkawi.



The plaster ceiling with its beautiful motifs was crafted by Uzbek artisans. Below: 'The Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun' award from Emperor Akihito of Japan.



Then there are the various international awards received by the first couple. Among those received by Dr Mahathir are the U-Thant Peace Award, Order of the Sun of Peru, Spain's Grand Cross of Civil Merit and

Japan's Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun.

An award received by Dr Siti Hasmah was Rotary's Paul Harris Fellow in appreciation of tangible and significant assistance given for the further-

ance of better understanding and friendly relations between the peoples of the world.

Keys to various cities in the world received by Dr Mahathir, include those for Mexico City, Davao, Santiago, Lahore, Dhaka and Bloomington in Indiana, the United States.

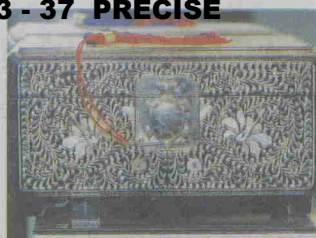
A key attraction at the gallery is its plaster ceiling which was beautifully crafted and painted by a group of artisans from Uzbekistan. The Uzbeks spent long, arduous hours painting the intricate motifs made from gypsum.

A new block, costing RM23mil, was completed and opened by Dr Siti Hasmah when she was on the island during the recent LIMA. Gallery manager Mahani Muhammad said a

group of about 20 Uzbek artisans had been commissioned to craft and paint the plaster ceiling and part of the walls of the new block.

Besides additional exhibit space, it has a theatre, library, cafe, *surau*, workshop, office and storage area.

Since its opening to the public in April 1996, more than 1.5 million people have visited the gallery. Admission is RM3 for adults and free for children below 12.



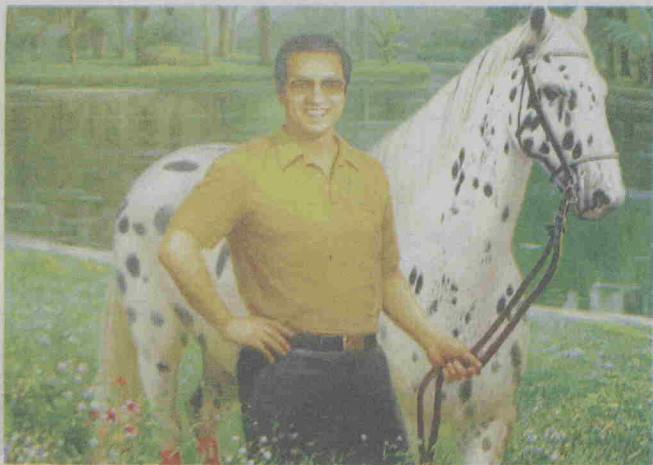
A jewellery box from Madam Young Hoon Kang, wife of the South Korean Prime Minister, to Dr Siti Hasmah.



Keys to the various cities which were given to Dr Mahathir.



For the equestrian – a gift from the Ambassador of the Republic of Uruguay, Nicolas Moreno, dated Dec 20, 1995.



A portrait of Dr Mahathir with a horse in a pastoral setting.