

Human wave at PM's Dept

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PUTRAJAYA: Despite having to jostle through crowds and standing in queue for an hour since 4pm under a hot sun, more than 2,000 people lined up patiently for a last glimpse of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad as Malaysia's fourth premier.

For Prime Minister's Department staff Datuk Rahmah Kassim and Zaiton Mat Piah, the experience of almost being pushed down the steps of Dataran Perdana, which led to the Prime Minister's Office, was "totally worth it."

"As staff from JPM, we have come across Tun many times in official functions before. But this time, it's different.

"It's his last day. Besides, he's been bestowed Tun today. I got to shake his hand, I almost fell down but that was worth it," said Rahmah, who is from the National Economic Action Council.

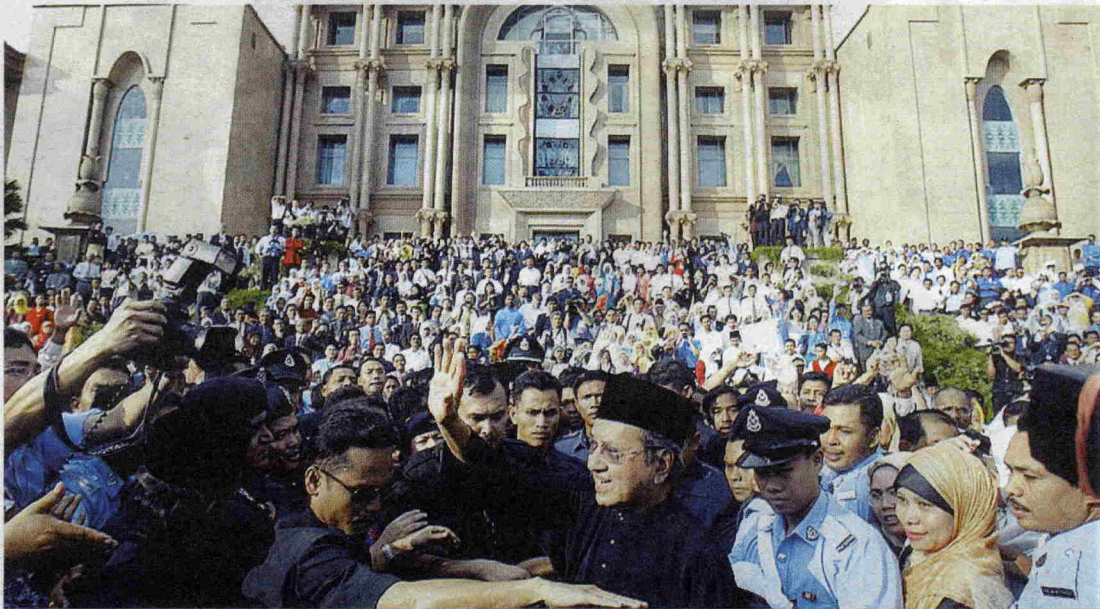
Zaiton, from the Protocol Department, said she was almost crushed by the "human wave" besieging Dr Mahathir as he stepped out from his office.

"There were so many people milling around him. Things got worse because the cameramen were trying to get a good shot of Dr Mahathir. They shouldn't be here today.

"Dr Mahathir's last day should be reserved just for the staff alone," she said.

Both the women admitted that they "cried a little", especially after the imam reading by the *doa* became choked by emotions.

For Ooi Siew Eng, who sacrificed whatever free time she



FAREWELL: Dr Mahathir waving goodbye to the thousands of civil servants who had gathered at the Prime Minister's Department in Putrajaya yesterday to see him off as he left his office for the last time.

had after office hours to meet Dr Mahathir, yesterday was the last chance to shake hand or take a photograph with him.

"All these years I have never met him personally but only see him through press reports.

"I want to get a last look at him and to say thank you for all that he's done for Malaysians. I

wish I have brought along my family," said Ooi, who is the personal secretary to Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn.

"Look at the crowds just waiting to greet him. He's like a superstar," she said.

Psychology Division director at the Biro Tatanegara Mohd Yusoff Ahmad said he could

never understand why there were still some people who continued to find fault with Dr Mahathir's administration.

"Dr Mahathir has taken the trouble to personally come speak to participants attending our courses. Since the courses took off in the year 2000, he's come to our camp in Rembau nine times.

"Each time, he would take up to four hours to give his speech and field whatever questions the staff have.

"Judging from the crowds here, you can see the majority of civil servants supported him, but there are still a few who would let emotions rule their thinking," he said.

Describing yesterday as an

extremely sad occasion, Mohd Yusoff said Dr Mahathir was "sacrificing" himself for the good of the nation.

"He always told us to stand up on our own and not to have a *tongkat*. In many ways, he's become our *tongkat* as Malaysians have gotten too dependent on him. But we still hate to let go of our *tongkat*," he said.