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IN HER MEMORY: Dr Mahathir taking a closer look at the cover of the first part of Dr Alijah's memoirs during the book's launch at Carcosa Seri Negara in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Memoirs of late activist launched

BY JASON SUNDAM

KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali, were among the people that the late Datuk Dr Alijah Gordon considered her dear friends.

Yesterday, Dr Mahathir recalled a time when the social activist was banished, just because she had criticised the sale of Israeli goods in the country.

"I remember trying to convince the Special Branch during the 80s to let this sweet lady back into the country as, surely, she cannot do any harm.

"It seems that we, as Malaysians, could not accept that

someone who was so giving and selfless like Alijah did not want something in return so we decided to banish her," the former Prime Minister said during a speech at the launch of her memoirs, *On Becoming Alijah Part 1: From the American Revolutionary War Through Burma, March 1957*.

Dr Mahathir was visibly moved as many of Dr Gordon's acquaintances recounted their experiences with their mentor and friend and spoke of her work for the local and Arab communities.

Dr Gordon, who headed the Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, died of pneumonia on Nov 18 last year at 74.

Before her death, she had instructed her friends to present to Dr Mahathir and his wife a parting gift in the form of an Indonesian *keris*, which she had bought during her banishment from Malaysia.

The *keris* was presented to the former premier and his wife at the launch of the book, the first of two on her memoirs, at Carcosa Seri Negara.

This book recounts how Dr Alijah, born as Shirley Gordon in New Jersey in the United States, became involved with upholding Kurd, Palestinian and Malay rights overseas and locally.

The book, retailing at RM96 a copy, tells its readers how an American became a Malaysian.