

Mahathir says sorry for absence at Umno assembly

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TUN Dr Mahathir Mohamad apologised to Umno delegates for his absence from this year's assembly.

"To all Umno delegates, have a good meeting. I apologise for not being together with you.

"I pray that God will open our hearts and give us the guidance for us to sacrifice all for religion, race and country," he said in a statement yesterday.

The former Umno president, whose party membership number is 0000001, was discharged from the National Heart Institute on Tuesday.

While Dr Mahathir followed the assembly proceedings on television, his wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali made an appearance at the Putra World Trade Centre at the party's invitation.

She showed up in a red and white kebaya - red and white being Umno colours - with a red shawl and pearl accessories, and was greeted by numerous party delegates and supporters when she set foot at Dewan Merdeka.

The former first lady

arrived at 9.20am accompanied by family members including daughter Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir and daughter-in-law Datin Mastisa Hani Mohamed Abid, wife of Datuk Mokhzani.

In the hall, Dr Siti Hasmah's presence was acknowledged by permanent chairman Datuk Onn Ismail in his opening remarks, prompting prolonged

rousing applause.

She left after party president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had delivered his policy speech.

As she made her way out, supporters again surged forward to greet her.

Earlier, Abdullah led delegates in prayers for the speedy recovery of Dr Mahathir.

"Let us also pray that Dr Siti

Hasmah and members of her family be given the strength and patience to see them through this difficult period. The Government will ensure that all facilities are provided for the treatment of the statesman."

Dr Siti Hasmah declined to take press questions. She just smiled as she waited for security personnel to clear the crowd for her to leave the building.