

A DINNER THAT MAY HELP PATCH UP TIES

By V.K. CHIN

KUALA LUMPUR: Anglo-Malaysian relations, which have been going through a bad patch recently, may receive a boost from the meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Mrs Margaret Thatcher in London tonight.

This will be the first meeting between the two leaders since Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's "buy British last policy" which was announced in late 1981.

Too much should not be read into the meeting, however, which is more of an informal dinner. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir had said he would attend the meeting with an "open mind".

The British have been looking forward to tonight's meeting more than the Malaysians. British officials had, in fact, been working feverishly to stop the slide in Anglo-Malaysian relations in the wake of the Mahathir announcement, which had caught them by surprise.

Since then, they had sometimes gone overboard in giving VIP treatment to



Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir and his British counterpart Mrs Margaret Thatcher... to meet over dinner

Malaysian leaders who happened to be in London on private visits. These leaders were sometimes dragged into hastily-arranged meetings with their British counterparts.

The British tried to "ambush" Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir into meeting with Mrs Thatcher when he was in London on transit last year, after attending the United Nations general assembly in New York.

But on the day that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir was free, Mrs Thatcher was

away from London attending the annual conference of the Conservative Party.

This time, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir is going to Brighton to witness his son's graduation; an opportunity that British officials feel is too good to miss.

But for all the concern, British goods have not been doing badly — if statistics are anything to go by.

There are two sets of trade figures, one Malaysian and the other British. According to the Malaysian figures, estimated exports to Britain last year totalled \$794 million. Imports came to \$1,216 million.

This was almost the same as in 1981 and 1980 where exports and imports were \$798 million and \$1,215 million, and \$779 million and \$1,271 million, respectively.

Thus, while the two-way trade has been stagnant, British businessmen have been able to hold their own in respect of Malaysia.

One common complaint against British companies is that there has not been any meaningful transfer of tech-

PM to meet Mrs T today

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will meet Mrs Margaret Thatcher unofficially in London tomorrow night, soon after his arrival at the British capital from New Delhi.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, who is in India to attend the non-aligned summit, will be on a private visit to Britain to witness his son's graduation at Brighton on Friday.

On learning about the visit, Whitehall officials invited him to have dinner with Mrs Thatcher at Downing Street and — the first time the two leaders would meet.

British officials have been doing their best to mend fences since Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir announced in late 1981 that the Government would no longer give preference to British goods.

Though there is no agenda, the two leaders are expected to touch on the deteriorating bilateral relations and international economic and political problems.

nology, no matter how simple this may be.

British investments used to be heavily concentrated in the mining and plantation sectors where they held sway for many years, even though the Government was more interested in promoting industrialisation.

But following substantial purchases by the Malaysian Government into these two sectors, the British have lost their grip in areas which they considered as sacrosanct.

These purchases were obviously a blow to British pride and so incensed the British businessmen that the London Takeover Code was amended to make it even more difficult for such future transactions to take place.

But things had settled down somewhat lately and British officialdom and companies have been more sympathetic to Malaysia.

This was best reflected by British application to set up industries last year. The Malaysian Industrial Development Authority

(Mida) approved projects worth \$80 million, making Britain the second largest investor after Japan's \$140 million.

But these were merely approvals; it was not known when the projects would materialise.

Perhaps the sorest point, where Malaysia is concerned, is the runaway escalation of university tuition fees, making education in Britain the most expensive in the Commonwealth.

The fee increases, necessitated by the deteriorating British economy, had forced the Malaysian government to look for alternative universities in other countries for its students.

Canada, the United States and even Japan and Korea, have become beneficiaries of the British action and more students were making their way to these countries for further education.

However, British universities are not doing too badly in attracting Malaysian students. In the academic year 1980/81 —

when the full fees came into force — there were still 13,000 Malaysians in British universities and public schools.

In the 1981/82 academic year, the Malaysian student population dropped by only 1,000.

In education, both the British government and companies are trying to make amends. Whitehall had recently announced a £5 million (\$17 million) grant for Malaysian students in UK spread over three years. (See accompanying report).

Malaysian and British officials are now working out the details of these grants. A British source said this would be left entirely to the Malaysian authorities. In addition, British companies are expected to donate \$1.5 million in scholarships for Malaysian students reading for degrees in Britain.

If British officials and businessmen should be tapping their fingers in anticipation of tonight's meeting, they should heed the words of Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Musa Hitam who said at a press conference in Singapore last month that "Britain should not assume that relations can be improved by a single gesture".

Since one swallow does not make a summer it should not also be assumed that bilateral ties would be back to normal after the Mahathir-Thatcher dinner

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir had spoken his mind on Anglo-Malaysian relation before and is unlikely he would repeat it.

He has got the message across to the British about Malaysia's views on bilateral ties loud and clear.