

# 'The man who made Mrs T eat humble pie'

LONDON, Tues. — The *London Times* generously described Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as the man who "made Thatcher eat humble pie". If anything, it reflected the regard that Malaysia's Prime Minister has earned from the Third World community here.

By a happy coincidence, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's private visit to London was preceded by the British Government's announcement of an aid package for foreign students, with a special provision for Malaysia, Cyprus and Hong Kong.

The partial reverse in the British Government's policy towards foreign students came when applications to universities had declined drastically to 6,753 last year from a peak of 23,000 in 1979.

The number of overseas students in polytechnics and colleges of further education dropped from over 80,000 in 1979 to about 55,000 last year.

The considerable dam-

age this would have done to British relations with its traditional allies did not go unnoticed, especially as the point was brought home rather poignantly by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's policies of buying British last.

It has now emerged that, had the Foreign and Commonwealth Office gained the upper hand when the fate of overseas students was discussed, there would not have been such a muddle.

## Students

Malaysia's reaction to Britain's ungenerous policies has caused Britain no less than £20 million (M\$70 million) and possibly as much as £50 million (M\$175 million).

The government's selective subsidy to overseas students — £46 million (M\$161 million) in all, plus an added £5 million (M\$17.5 million) for Malaysians — was in response to a report prepared by the Overseas Students' Trust (OST).

The OST, which is backed by multinationals, recommended in its

report entitled *A policy for overseas students*, a "change in the use of a tiny fraction of the £2.3 billion (M\$8 billion) of government money (used) annually for the furtherance of our objective in trade, aid and diplomacy."

Its recommendations were modest — it simply wanted funds already allocated for those objectives to be redirected to help overseas students.

The British government sat on the OST report for eight months before finally announcing the £46 million (M\$161 million) package for overseas students.

The announced package was to be spread over three years and as such, was substantially less than that recommended by the OST.

What remains to be seen is whether the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the department which announced the new policy, will in future be allowed to play a determining role in the affairs of overseas students. — Bernama