

Rajaratnam pays unusual tribute to 'horology' PM

SINGAPORE, Thurs. — An unusual speaker deserves an unusual introduction — and that was precisely what Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad got before he delivered the Singapore Lecture 1988 last night.

It was given by former Senior Minister S. Rajaratnam, who was chairman for the evening, an occasion attended by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, most of his Cabinet colleagues and the cream of Singapore society.

And the very first sentence showed that this old wordsmith had been hard at work.

The Malaysian Prime Minister, said Mr Rajaratnam, was an unconventional politician who would, when necessary, drive through "No Entry" political, economic and legal signs without batting an eyelid.

So began an introduction that was, in essence, a handsome tribute to Dr Mahathir for his contributions to warm relations between Malaysia and Singapore.

Mr Rajaratnam, now a Distinguished Senior Fellow at the Institute of South-east Asian Studies, which organises the annual lecture, said he would prepare the audience psychologically for Dr Mahathir by talking about his forays into "horology".

In gist, horology was his way of postulating various scenarios on how this part of the world might have turned out had certain events in history gone some other way.

All of which was designed to underscore and explain, in entertaining fashion, why the des-

tiny of Malaysia and that of Singapore had been so inextricably bound with each other.

His punchline to the audience in the Singapore Conference Hall was that, as far as bilateral relations were concerned, Dr Mahathir was, horologically, born at the right time, to set in motion events that had brought good to both countries.

"I am revealing no state secrets when I say that relations between our two countries, prior to the advent of a Dr Mahathir Government, was, to put it diplomatically, comparable to that between a neurotic bull and a schizophrenic matador," said Mr Rajaratnam.

However, under Dr Mahathir's leadership, relations changed dramatically for the better.

It had matured from that between "petulant juveniles" to one between "intelligent and business-like friendly adults".

"Today the ups and downs of our respective currencies are treated as normal responses to normal economic laws and not as bullfights," said the former senior Minister.

As evidence, he cited a headline in a Malaysian Malay newspaper, *Utusan Melayu*, of Dec 1 which read: "The low Malaysian ringgit brings blessings".

Such a headline, he said, was unthinkable in either Singapore or Malaysian newspapers before the Mahathir era.

Then he said: "I apologise for the sneaky way of introducing our distinguished speaker." — ST