

Thatcher: Dr M is a statesman

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Former British Prime Minister Lady Margaret Thatcher today paid tribute to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, describing him as a truly remarkable national leader.

Thatcher said Dr Mahathir has brought Malaysia to the forefront of both regional and world affairs.

"Few leaders earn the title statesman. But in Dr Mahathir's case, there is no doubt that the accolade has been won by his achievements," she said.

Thatcher, who flew in yesterday, said this in her keynote address at the *Citibank Leadership Series* at Hotel Istana. She is on a three-day visit as a guest of the bank.

Thatcher said: "You will

find in history that it is not necessarily the biggest countries who exert the most influence, it is those with the strongest leadership and clearest vision.

"And it is these qualities in Dr Mahathir which have propelled Malaysia in a very brief time to its present fortunate position," she said.

Thatcher said the result was that Malaysia had been able to provide its people with very much higher living standards, while at the same time assume a world role as a spokesman for Southeast Asia.

"Dr Mahathir never shrinks from giving a lead, however difficult the issue. His uncompromising stand against evil trade in drugs is one example," she said.

By rejecting soft options, she said, Dr Mahathir had made possible the spectacular take-off of Malaysia's economy.

"Leadership involves many lonely decisions, but Dr Mahathir has never faltered or ducked them."

Thatcher said her relations with Dr Mahathir when they were both Prime Ministers got off to a bit of sticky start in the early 1980s.

"But together we overcame those difficulties, forged a firm friendship and inaugurated a new age of co-operation and equal partnership between Malaysia and Britain," she said.

Both leaders then opened the way for great expansion of trade and air services be-

tween the two countries.

"And the decade ended with Dr Mahathir chairing and hosting the best organised Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meeting which I ever attended, the meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 1989," Thatcher said.

Her tribute was also extended to Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim for the prudent monetary and fiscal policies which he has pursued, and indeed for making Malaysia such an open financial market.

"If Finance Ministers could be transferred like soccer players, I could think of several very much larger countries who would pay astronomical transfer fees to get him (Anwar)," Thatcher said.