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Ex-Aussie PM praises Dr M for outstanding leadership

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Former Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke today praised Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for being one of the most successful leaders in the world.

He said under Dr Mahathir's leadership, Malaysia had managed to transform from a commodity-based economy to one which was increasingly based on manufacturing and service industries.

Hawke said this in a speech during the official launch of the Jade San Lembah Jati homestead development at Menara Kuala Lumpur.

The project was launched by Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh.

Hawke is here to form a partnership with Jade San Realty Sdn Bhd, the developer of the project, to set up World Pitch and Putt (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, which was also launched during the ceremony.

He is an adviser to World Pitch and Putt Corporation Incorporated, a Canadian company which holds the franchise licence for World Pitch and Putt golf courses.

Hawke, who was Prime Minister from 1983 to 1991, said: "As Prime Minister of Australia for almost nine years and since that time, as a close observer of world and regional affairs, I have had the opportunity of meeting with and watching a wide range of national leaders.

"While it is a matter of record that your Prime Minister and I have had a couple of minor differences in that period, I want to say that by any objective criteria, Dr Mahathir must be ranked as one of the outstandingly successful leaders in the world today.

"Under his 16 years in the top office of this country, Malaysia has been transformed," he said.

Hawke said economic growth in Malaysia had been high and sustained.

He added that the Malaysian economy had diversified from one which depended on rural and mining production to one in which a wide range of sophisticated manufacturing and service industries played an increasingly important role.

He also said Malaysia's society had become mutually tolerant, with each group reinforcing the talents of the other to advance the interests of the nation as a whole.

"And, with all this, the voice of Malaysia, previously little noticed, is now firmly articulated and listened to with respect in the region and beyond," he said.

In 1986, Hawke created a diplomatic row when he described Malaysia's hanging of convicted drug traffickers Kevin Barlow and Brian Chambers as "barbaric."

Dr Mahathir, however, responded by saying that the comment was Hawke's opinion and that he (Dr Mahathir) was not interested in what he had to say.

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