

Taipei mayor sings praises of Malaysia

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KUALA LUMPUR: Popular Taipei Mayor Ma Ying-jeou lived up to his celebrity status when over 1,000 people, including MCA deputy ministers, turned up for his forum here on Sunday.

The politician, known for his movie star looks, used his diplomatic skills and praised Malaysia for its development.

The 50-year-old Harvard educated lawyer-turned-politician praised Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"Malaysia has developed from a poor agricultural country to an industrial nation. We are certain about Dr Mahathir's contributions in the development of Malaysia," he said.

Ma also pointed out that his family name sounded alike to Dr Mahathir and Malaysia, adding that Chinese-speaking Asians referred to Malaysia as Da (big) Ma while Dr Mahathir was fondly called Lao (old) Ma.

Last week, Ma came first in the Kuomintang Party polls, confirming him as the rising star in Taiwan's main opposition party.

Delegates at the Nationalist Party congress elected Ma to the 210-member central committee with more than 1,000 votes, the most number obtained by any candidate.

Many party members are

pinning their hopes on Ma winning power back from President Chen Shui-bian's Democratic Progressive Party in the next presidential election in 2004.

Asked whether his good looks had gained him support in the city election, Ma said: "There are no statistics so I cannot comment. But I believe

appearance is not so important.

"I will grow old and I have grown older now compared to two-and-a-half years ago," he said, noting that knowledge was far more important.

The forum, Pace to Face With Mayor Ma, was held at the Palace of the Golden Horseshoes.