

Mahathir proud of improved race relations

STAR 19 OCT 2002

NEW DELHI: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad regards forging closer race relations in Malaysia's plural society as his most important achievement in his 21 years as Prime Minister.

"I believe the only achievement to me and the most important is to be able to continue the racial harmony in Malaysia," he said.

Dr Mahathir said race relations were not easy in a multi-racial country like Malaysia but his predecessors had laid down strong ground rules.

He recalled that when he was appointed the Prime Minister, he was labelled an "ultra nationalist" who was likely to oppress the Chinese and Indians.

"After being in the seat for 21 years, race relations have improved. My successor will continue with the good work," he told a press conference here yesterday, in response to a question by an Indian journalist on his legacy.

Indian newspapers gave him wide coverage, with the *Times of India* reporting that Dr Mahathir "floored Delhi with his charm and straight-talk, even getting seasoned diplomats and hard-headed businessmen to swallow some unpleasant home truths about the sub-continent."

The Prime Minister was given a standing ovation after speaking at the Asean-India Business Summit on Thursday.