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(The NST diary)

DKL

You may disagree with her, but admire the way she said it. THE diarist had a chance meeting with Lady Margaret Thatcher in 1993 at the Alor Star airport where they exchanged a few words. She had just been conferred an honorary doctorate of philosophy by Universiti Utara Malaysia in 1993.

Thatcher polarised British society more than at any time after the Second World War and privatised industries and utilities. She was the longest-serving Prime Minister in the 20th century (11 years) and was forced to resign in November 1990.

She will make no more public speeches (on medical advice). You may not have agreed with what the "Iron Lady" said, but you would have been impressed with the passion and the way she said it. Her retirement is a relief for friends worried about her health and her enemies.

It is the end of a remarkable era in British politics. You either liked Thatcherism or hated it. Her place in British history is secure.

For 25 years, Thatcher's voice was part of every Briton's life. One can imagine the impact on this nation when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad leaves the political scene for he has effectively been part of every Malaysian's life for a much longer period than Thatcher's.

The diarist lived in Cambridge and London at the height of Thatcherism, and understood and applauded the magnitude of Thatcher's achievements but he also felt the loathing of the underclass and the establishment - she came from a lower middle-class family.

Dr Mahathir's critics may detest his politics, but they will have to admire his passion for hard work, vision and the remarkable achievements of the last 20 years, all of which came about because he is pragmatic, sensible, a man who refuses to shirk controversy.

Thatcher is an unforgiving woman. She has never forgotten those who "assassinated" her at the height of her power. Dr Mahathir, on the other hand, forgave and forgives his enemies.

A former senior Minister told the diarist he disagreed with many things Dr Mahathir is doing. The diarist told him to put himself in the PM's shoes. If he still disagreed, he could call the diarist on his private line. He has not called!