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Hawke-Mahathir

FORMER AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER PRAISES DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 25 (Bernama) -- Former Australian Prime Minister

Bob Hawke, who caused a diplomatic row with Malaysia over the hanging of two convicted Australian drug traffickers in 1986, today praised Prime

Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for his achievement in transforming Malaysia from a commodity-based to a manufacturing economy.

"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, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad must be ranked as one of the outstandingly successful leader in the world today," he said.

"Under his 16 years in the top office in this country, Malaysia was transformed," he said at an official launch of Jade San Lembah Jati, an exclusive housing estate, by Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh, here.

Hawke is the advisor of World Pitch & Putt Corporation Inc (WPPCI), a Canadian company that holds the worldwide franchise licence for World Pitch & Putt golf courses.

He is here to form a partnership with Jade San Realty Sdn Bhd, the local property developer of the housing estate, to establish World Pitch & Putt (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd (WPPM).

Hawke said that Malaysia's economic growth has been high and the economy has been diversified from one basically dependent on rural and mining production to one in which a wide range of sophisticated manufacturing and service industries play an increasingly important role.

"Malaysia, a society which had been marked by racial tensions, has become mutually tolerant with each element reinforcing the talents of the other to advance the interests of the nation as a whole," he said.

"And, the voice of Malaysia -- previously little noticed -- is now

firmly articulated, and listened to with respect, in the region and beyond," he added.

Hawke caused a diplomatic row when he described the hanging of Kevin Barlow and Brain Chambers as "barbaric".

However, Dr Mahathir in his reply had said: "That is his opinion. I am not interested." -- BERNAMA

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