

Margaret Thatcher never feared doing it her way

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Malaysians offer their deepest sympathy to family of Baroness Margaret Thatcher who passed away on April 8.

The former British premier together with US president Ronald Reagan and the Soviet Union's general-secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, presided over the demise of Cold War, the Soviet Union and the birth of Russia.

During the decade-old clenched fist reign of the Iron Lady, who was also once billed as a coat-tail of Reagan's, we also saw the fall of the Brandenburg Wall in Berlin (1989).

I remember her fondly as an authoritarian leader who fought with foreign secretary Michael Heseltine over the poll tax.

I also remember how she fought off Heseltine's challenge and ended his political career in the 80s, at about the same time as former Malaysian premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad ended Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah's aspirations as prime minister by winning the Umno presidency in 1987 by just two votes.

I also remember vividly that she took office at about the same time as Mahathir in the early 1980s and that was the time when he initiated the 'buy British last' policy and the 'look east' policy.

Subsequently, their cold relations thawed and more and more Malaysians went to UK to further their studies. It was also during her time that UK home student fees were abolished and we had to pay full student fees.

I also remember that she led the Conservative government for several terms and outlived several Labour leaders e.g. John Smith, who died of a heart attack at age 54.

It was only after she left that young leaders like the Conservative party's John Major and Labour's Tony Blair came into power.

She ruled a nation with an iron fist, so much so that young people grew up to dislike her. But in the process, Britain grew in stature as a respected nation in the west.

I also remember how she introduced the unpopular poll tax which caused riots in Central London's Oxford Street, where policemen on horseback fought street battles with young stone-throwing protesters.

She fought many running battles with trade unionists and coal miners at a time when trade unions and worker power were the order of the day.

It was also during her time that race relations were taken to a stiff test, when racial riots broke out in predominantly black areas in South London.

And I also remember fondly that she, as a woman of no fear, was able to take on all the men, during Question Time in the House of Commons and I used to enjoy her debates with the opposition leader.

She could tackle the men without looking at her scripts.

Actually we should all learn from British parliamentary democracy where MPs can argue on issues inside the House of Commons and still adjourn to the canteen for coffee later.

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