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Newspaper	The Straits Times
Date	9/3/2011

'MM Lee offered to send medical team for my heart surgery'

KUALA LUMPUR: Former Malaysian prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad yesterday revealed that Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew had offered to fly a medical team to Malaysia to perform heart surgery on him in 1989.

This was when Tun Dr Mahathir had his first heart attack and had to undergo a bypass operation. He decided to have it in Kuala Lumpur instead of the United States to demonstrate his confidence in Malaysia's medical services.

He said he had decided to entrust his life to heart specialist Yahya Awang, who was also the son of a family friend.

Dr Mahathir wrote that MM Lee rang at 10pm on the eve of the operation to speak to his wife Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

"He asked her to persuade to postpone the operation because he had a medical team ready to fly to Kuala Lumpur, with the well-known cardiac surgeon, Dr Victor Chang, a Singaporean living in Australia, to do the surgery," he wrote.

"But Hasmah said I had already made up my mind and the family agreed with me. She thanked him and promised to call as soon as the operation was over."

Dr Mahathir said MM Lee also made an

appeal to former finance minister Daim Zainuddin to ask him to intercede with Tun Dr Siti Hasmah.

"Despite our many differences throughout the years, I appreciated Lee's concern," he wrote.

Dr Mahathir said his relationship with Mr Lee through the years remained proper and professional, but was never very friendly.

In another chapter, he wrote about his first official visit as Premier in 1981 to Singapore, where he felt slighted.

He said he was greeted only by a proto-

col officer at the Prime Minister's Office and was put in a holding room.

"I was made to wait for about 15 minutes and felt very sorely used.

"This was not the proper way to greet a foreign visitor of equal rank," he said.

He said that when MM Lee and, later, his successors visited Kuala Lumpur, he followed this precedent while according other heads of government a ceremonial welcome at Parliament house.

He also said there was no state dinner on that particular visit to Singapore, and that when he paid a call on President Ben-

jamin Sheares, who was his professor in medical college, they spoke for 20 minutes before his aide said the President had another appointment.

"I took the hint, got up and left," he said. Dr Mahathir made his first visit to Singapore as Premier in December 1981, when Mr Devan Nair was president. Mr Nair had succeeded Mr Sheares, who had died in May the same year.

Then-PM Lee had welcomed Dr Mahathir at the airport while Mr Nair hosted a lunch for him.

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