

We'll miss you Dr M, say Singaporeans

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TOMORROW, the man who shaped Malaysia's policies towards Singapore for the last two decades retires as Prime Minister and will pass on the baton to his deputy. Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Despite flashes of irritation at Dr Mahathir Mohamad's acerbic rhetoric. Singapore leaders do not underestimate his achievements in shaping Malaysia into one of the world's top 20 trading nations, analysts said.

They have also expressed optimism over post-Mahathir Malaysia and lauded him for having developed "solid foundations"

for his successor to build on.

"I think there's a lot of admiration among Singaporeans for Dr Mahathir's vision of a modern, multi-racial Malaysia and courage in pursuing it and, of course, his transformation of Malaysia into one of the most advanced nations in South East Asia," political observer Seali Chiang Nee said.

Many people were particularly full of praise for his actions against racial and religious extremism, his daring battle against feudal Sultans, for English language and "backward" practices of the Malays, he told Bernama.

"It's hard for anyone to emulate without running into trouble," said Seah, a veteran journalist and now Editor of *IMtlespeck.com*.

But Singaporeans, he said, also "rightly or wrongly see him as having personal adverse feelings against Singapore" which had spilled into bilateral relations in recent years.

"People still remember his reference of "many ways to skin the cat (Singapore)," he said.

He noted that in recent years there had been a sharp deterioration of bilateral ties, erasing many of the diplomatic gains in earlier years. - Bernama