

I will be missing my elder brother, says Thaksin

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SONGKHLA (South Thailand), Thurs. — Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra today described Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's tenure of office as leaving "a memorable impact in having blazed the trail well for the developing nations in the region to prosper".

"Yes, that is his priceless gift and much to be cherished by his friendly neighbours and as for me, I will be missing my elder brother," Thaksin told the *New Straits Times* in a telephone interview today.

He said Dr Mahathir's presence at the recent Apec summit and emphasising for a "free and fair trade" well reflected his concern for the region's urgent needs and aspirations.

"His maturity of political thought had withstood the pressures from the political dichotomies faced in the course of charting the future of Ma-

laysia and that of Southeast Asia," said Thaksin in paying a special tribute to the Prime Minister.

He said Dr Mahathir's endurance and perseverance in the light of the harsh political realities of the day, had placed him in an elevated stature among Asean nations.

Thaksin said Dr Mahathir had rightly diagnosed the political ailments by providing the right treatment as and when the need demanded.

As for the next PM, he said, "Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is a seasoned politician and an experienced diplomat. With such a fitting combination, I am confident he will do a fine job."

"I assure Malaysia of Thailand's continued co-operation in all aspects. Let us look forward together in the spirit of 'Love Thy Neighbour' and 'Prosper Thy Neighbour'."