

## **Tun Mahathir Saddened By Kuan Yew's Demise**

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KUALA LUMPUR, March 27 (Bernama) -- "I cannot say I was a close friend of (Lee) Kuan Yew, but still I feel sad at his demise," said former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad of the Singaporean statesman who died on Monday.

In an article titled 'Kuan Yew and I' published on his blog, Dr Mahathir provided insights into episodes when his and Kuan Yew's paths intertwined.

"When I became PM (prime minister) in 1981, I paid a courtesy call on Kuan Yew. It was a friendly call and he immediately agreed to my proposal that the Malaysia and Singapore times which had always been the same should be advanced by half an hour," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he explained that it would be easier adjusting the time when travelling as the two countries would fall within the time zones fixed for the whole world at one hour intervals.

"I am afraid on most other issues we could not agree," said Dr Mahathir, who was prime minister of Malaysia from 1981 to 2003.

Kuan Yew, who was Singapore's first prime minister, died at the age of 91 at the Singapore General Hospital where he had been admitted for severe pneumonia. Relations between Kuan Yew and Dr Mahathir also took a more personal turn when Dr Mahathir had a heart attack in 1989 and required open heart surgery.

"He (Kuan Yew) cared enough to ring up my wife (Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali) to ask her to delay the operation as he had arranged for the best heart surgeon, a Singaporean living in Australia, to do the operation. But by then, I had been given pre-med and was asleep prior to the operation the next day.

"My wife thanked him but apologised. She promised to ring him up after the operation. She did the next evening," Dr Mahathir said.

"When he was ill, I requested to see him. He agreed but the night before the visit, the Singapore High Commissioner received a message that he was very sick and could not see me," he recalled.

Dr Mahathir related another episode when the two men met, this time in Japan.

"When he attended the Nihon Keizai Shimbun annual conference on the Future of Asia in Tokyo, which I never failed to attend, I went up to him at dinner to ask how he was," Dr Mahathir said.

He said they sat down together to chat and the Japanese photographers took their pictures,

promising not to put it in the press.

"I wouldn't mind even if they did. But I suppose people will make all kinds of stories about it," he said.

Dr Mahathir turned sentimental when he said: "No matter how friendly or unfriendly we are, the passing away of a man you know well saddens you."

The Malaysian statesman went on to say that Kuan Yew's passage marked the end of the period when those who fought for independence led their countries and knew the value of independence.

ASEAN, he reckoned, lost strong leadership with the passing of Indonesia's President Suharto and Kuan Yew.

Dr Mahathir shared with readers that Kuan Yew became well known at a young age, noting that he was a student in Singapore when he read about the latter's defence of labour unions.

Dr Mahathir recalled that he first met Kuan Yew when the former was a Member of Parliament in 1964 after Singapore joined Malaysia in 1963, crossing swords many times during the debates.

"But there was no enmity, only differences in our views of what was good for the newborn nation. He included me among the ultra Malays who were responsible for the racial riots in Singapore.

"Actually I never went to Singapore to stir up trouble. Somebody else whom I would not name did," Dr Mahathir explained.

He reminisced that Malaysia's first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj attended the inaugural meeting of the People's Action Party (PAP) and was quite friendly with Kuan Yew.

"He believed Kuan Yew was a bastion against Communism. But when the PAP contested in the Malaysian elections in 1964 with Malaysian Malaysia as its slogan, Tunku felt that the PAP's presence in Malaysia was going to be disruptive for the country," he added.

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