Mahathir conferred honorary doctorate

It is in recognition of his outstanding leadership of Malaysia and other achievements

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A few hundred guests gathered at the NUS Yong Siew Tock Conservatory of Music yesterday to witness Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad receive an honorary doctorate in law from the National University of Singapore, but he still made time for a handful of old college friends from seven decades ago.

"Can we have a hug?" was the first thing former cardiologist Wong Bee Ung, 91, said when she met Tun Dr Mahathir. Like him, she is a member of the "Medicine Class of 1947", the cohort of 76 students who enrolled at the King Edward VII College of Medicine that year.

The college later became part of NUS, which yesterday conferred the doctorate on Dr Mahathir in recognition of his outstanding leadership of Malaysia and his enduring contributions to the longstanding bilateral relations between Singapore and Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir, 93, is on his first official visit to Singapore since emerging from 15 years of retirement to become prime minister again in May. He had previously served from 1982 to 1999.

"Malaysia's longest-serving prime minister and the world's most senior elected statesman re-tuned to alma mater this year in a stunning demonstration of his abiding love for Malaysia and his desire to enhance growth and prosperity in his country," he said. "I am, in many eyes, a living example of bold leadership and boldness, resilience, a reformer who brought about the rise of Malaysia." He was, in his words, "a bad boy who has navigated the complex and often treacherous world of international politics to ensure the prosperity of his beloved nation".

The IMF's most recent assessment of Malaysia's economy was positive, with the economy expected to grow by 4.5% in 2018. Dr Mahathir's policies, including the "Malaysia First" strategy, have been credited with driving the country's economic growth.

"I commend the IMF for its assessment of Malaysia's economy. It is clear that the country has made significant progress in recent years under the leadership of Dr Mahathir," the IMF said in a statement.

The event was attended by high-level officials from both countries, including Singapore President Halimah Yacob and NUS Chancellor Chua Soon Tong.

"I am thrilled to welcome Dr Mahathir to NUS and to present him with this honour," said Ong Eng Teik, NUS President. "Dr Mahathir is a true leader, who has shown time and time again that he is dedicated to the betterment of his country and the region."

Dr Mahathir received the honourary degree in recognition of his contributions to the field of medicine and his role in shaping Malaysia's political landscape.

"I am humbled and extremely grateful to receive this honour from NUS," Dr Mahathir said. "I have always been a strong advocate for education and the importance of higher learning. This recognition is a testament to the hard work and dedication of all those who have contributed to our country's development over the years."