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DEVELOPED NORTH MUST PAY FOR CONSERVATION OF TROPICAL FOREST, SAYS DR M

Mahathir - forest

from Wan A. Hulaimi

LONDON, June 2<sup>nd</sup> (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was given centre-stage treatment in a BBC current affairs programme on the Rio Summit in which he urged developed countries not to regard the tropical forest as common heritage if they are not willing to pay for its conservation.

The 40-minute current affairs flagship of the BBC, +Panorama+, which was shown at peak time on Monday night, chose Dr Mahathir as the spokesman for the South in a special programme entitled +The South Strikes Back+.

Programme reporter Steve Bradshaw said Malaysia was a developing country which was +above all, rich enough to challenge the environmental assumptions the North now makes about how to save the planet+.

British viewers saw Dr Mahathir as a tough no-nonsense leader who took the cudgel on behalf of poor countries of the South against the collective onslaught of the richer North who are eager to extract a heavy price from them for the preservation of man's natural heritage.

Dr Mahathir explained his frankness by telling his interviewer: +A lot of the countries in the South owe a lot to the North. We happen to be a little bit more independent, and all of them tell us that we would say the same thing as you have said except that ... we depend upon aid from the North and it is not diplomatic to say nasty things about aid donors, or we might be cut off. But of course they all support what we say.+ -- more

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+So you say the same things that other countries don't?+ asked reporter Steven Bradshaw who earlier described Dr Mahathir as +the political wheeler-dealer of the South.+ +We do, we stick out our neck for them,+ Dr Mahathir replied.

The view of the South was stated very clearly by Dr Mahathir in the earlier part of the programme which showed extracts from his speech at the second Ministerial Conference of Developing Countries on Environment and Development in Kuala Lumpur in April.

In the speech, Dr Mahathir warned that if the rich North expected the poor to foot the bill for a cleaner environment, Rio would become an exercise in futility.

Reporter Bradshaw prefaced another segment of his interview with Dr Mahathir by saying that Malaysians admitted that up to half of their remaining rainforest would have been logged by the end of the century, and that the rich Northern countries were sceptical of Malaysia's claim of sustainable logging.

The interview climaxed in a memorable exchange:

Bradshaw: +But isn't the rainforest a common inheritance of all mankind?+

Dr Mahathir: +No!+

Bradshaw: +Doesn't it in a sense belong to us all?+

Dr Mahathir: +No! It is not a common inheritance unless you are willing to pay for it. You don't pay for it, you expect us to pay for it. No go!+

-- Bernama

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