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Mahathir-Newsweek

MALAYSIA'S STABILITY MY MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 21<sup>93</sup> (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says he considers Malaysia's stability his major achievement in the past 12 years as Prime Minister.

In an interview with Newsweek International, he said Malaysians had been living in a very harmonious manner despite being multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious.

"This is a major achievement. After all, just look around the world today, + he said when asked about his greatest disappointments and achievements after 12 years in office.

The interview was published in the magazine's Jan 25 edition carried in both English and Japanese as part of a 40-page special section entitled "Malaysia - Forward to 2020".

He said: "I guess I'd say my biggest disappointment is that people don't work as hard as I would like (them to)."

However, he did not often think about the matter, he added.

Dr Mahathir said he would continue in office as long as he was needed and that he would not stay on otherwise. -- more

▼21/01/18-13MST

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"The people seem pleased with my policies. Economically, things are going very well. As long as we keep going forward with successful policies, I should continue to be welcome," he added.

Asked whether he accept the mantle of "Voice of the Third World", Dr Mahathir said although he spoke his mind and have strong opinions, he had never seek any sort of position.

According to him he made his opinion known on issues he felt strongly about such as free trade and the environment, and added that "this comes naturally to me".

In the interview which covered several topics, Dr Mahathir was also asked to describe his relationship with the United States.

He said the situation was not as bad as it might seem.

"We speak very frankly. Clearly, we have differences of opinion but it wasn't as bad as it might seem," he added.

He hoped Malaysia's relationship with Washington would be as excellent as the one with Britain. -- more

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Saying that he had always been forthright, Dr Mahathir said the present relationship with Britain flourished even though he introduced a "Buy British Last" policy when he came to power.

To a question whether he was worried about the recent Chinese move to explore oil and gas in the Spratly Islands, he said he was confident that the Chinese and everyone concerned would settle the dispute diplomatically and peacefully.

Dr Mahathir said he did not find the issue very alarming based on recent statements made by the Chinese that they were open to discussion "and I take them at their word".

On the possibility of eco-tourism threatening the environment, he said this would not happen "if you manage it correctly and promote the correct things."

The key was to avoid trampling the environment but utilising it, he added. -- more

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Malaysia had discovered through developing its tourism industry that people would like to have a relationship with the environment, he said.

Dr Mahathir said the important thing was to strike a balance between the environment and economic development.

"You have to have regulations in place that guarantee that the environment won't get trampled; at the same time you have to take advantage of your natural resources efficiently," he added.

For instance, he said, the people were more important than the spotted owl, something many environmental groups seemed to forget.

He pointed out that he had always believed that the environment needed to be protected. -- Bernama

▼21/01/19-05MST