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BBC-Mahathir

BBC FOCUSES ON MAHATHIR'S VISION FOR MALAYSIA

From Wan A. Hulaimi⁹³

LONDON, July 16 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Vision 2020 and Malaysia's present remarkable growth rate were used as a focus for comparison in a television debate on the industrial decline of Britain and its future direction on BBC2's flagship news programme "Newsnight" last Thursday.

The evening news programme, which devoted nearly 30 minutes of its 45-minute slot to "chew over some unpalatable lessons" from Malaysia, opened with a question from anchorman Jeremy Paxton.

"How does Malaysia manage to expand its economy by eight per cent a year? They've seen the future and, for them it works. Where did we go wrong?"

The answer came from Dr Mahathir who said: "You have lost your sense of direction. You have discarded all the values that you have inherited and in its place you have this idea that everybody must be absolutely free."

After seeing a report from Malaysia by Newsnight reporter Elenka Freinkel, two participants - a leading manufacturer and the Secretary General of a large manufacturing workers trade union - agreed that Britain had indeed lost its direction, and unlike Malaysia, lacked a vision for the future. -- more

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BBC-Mahathir 2 London

The other participant, Industry Minister Tim Sainsbury, although expressing whether Dr Mahathir's measures were appropriate for Britain, agreed that Malaysia's high productivity was something which Britain could follow.

Dr Mahathir told the BBC reporter that in addition to lacking direction, Britain was also living beyond its means to become competitive in the world.

"They (Britain) must first lower their standard of living to the level that they can afford. And then work their way up by becoming competitive again. You know the dole you have been paid in the UK for example is so high that there is no way you can pay wages lower than that," he said.

The report on Malaysia highlighted the country's continued high growth rate, high tech industries, political and social stability and its racial diversity.

Freinkel said: "In less than a decade Malaysia has transformed itself from a Third World provider of cheap labour and raw material to one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

"Despite its late start, it was years behind Japan and Taiwan, the economic pioneers in this region, despite its ethnic and religious diversity

- which all experts said would hold it back - and despite its authoritarian and sometimes repressive regime for which it received some criticisms in the West, Malaysia has found political and economic stability, and it is catching up fast," she added. -- more

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If Malaysia maintained its current rate of growth, she observed, not only would it achieve its vision of full development by the year 2020 but along with other surging economies in the region, it would outrun the West.

In an interview at his residence (described by the reporter as "a presidential palace"), Dr Mahathir defended Malaysia's "Big Brother" attitude and the limits to freedom.

He said: "We tell the people that this is good, and this is bad, and this is what you should do and accept, and these are things that you shouldn't. In a way the government gives a lot of guidance, almost, people would say, like a Big Brother. Looking at the West now, you have adopted this idea of freedom until it really damages the society. So these are things that we don't see happen here."

When asked by anchorman Paxman after watching the report on Malaysia what lessons could be learned, leading industrialist Karl Watkin replied: "I think Mr Mahathir said it all, the country's got a vision. It has got a direction, and it is committed to manufacturing and building a sound economic base. I don't think we have a vision or direction in manufacturing industry in the UK."

The trade unionist, General Secretary of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Workers Union (MSF) Roger Lyons, while citing the ILO's criticism of Malaysia's suppression of its trade unions, also agreed that Britain, unlike Malaysia, lacked a vision. -- Bernama

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