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Mahathir-Interview (Transcript)

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 6 (Bernama) -- Following is the translation of the transcript of Utusan Melayu Group Editor-in-Chief Johan Jaaffar's special interview with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad over Radio Television Malaysia tonight in conjunction with Dr Mahathir's 15 years in office.

Johan Jaaffar: Fifteen years ago on July 16, 1981 Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad took his oath of office as Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister. Nobody could predict what a personality, once described as an ultra, can do, someone once expelled from his party and whose book was banned in his own country.

Anybody keeping track of his development and political career will undoubtedly be fascinated. As Umno's president he had gone through the roughest time in his political career when Umno was declared illegal and his leadership challenged. As Prime Minister, his privatisation policy initially drew strong criticism. So did his new direction towards the nation's industrialisation.

But today we know that he has not only proven his detractors and critics wrong but also made the nation one of the extraordinary success stories. The results can be seen everywhere. Malaysia has now become a special industrialised nation among developing countries. Malaysia is the world's 19th biggest exporter. When people talk about the East Asian Miracle, it is inevitable to mention Malaysia's pioneering role in this remarkable development in the region and Malaysia's economic success serves as a model to many developing countries.

People talk about Malaysia with respect. Ladies and gentlemen, with me in the special studio in the Prime Minister's Department is Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Thank You, Datuk Seri, for sparing time for this special interview.

Q: I would like to begin by asking whether you have ever imagined that Malaysia would achieve its position today when you were first elected Prime Minister 15 years ago.

A: I would not say that I had imagined it, but I had from the very beginning believed that any country is able to achieve development given the right conditions. Therefore, we can see today that it was not inaccurate after all.

Q: There are views that Malaysia's economic success was purely accidental. What is your view on this?

A: If it (the success) was by accident, then it would have happened in other countries too. In fact, other developing countries have even more potential and do not have the problems we face in Malaysia, such as a multi-racial society, which is known to have been the main cause of racial conflicts hindering national development in other nations.

Q: You also champion a grand vision to make Malaysia a developed nation by 2020. You know, we actually do not have much time. We only have 5,840 days or less than 23 years. To ensure that Malaysia will become a developed nation by 2020 we have to maintain our annual economic growth at eight per

cent for at least 23 years more. I don't think any other country had this record. Do you think we can do it?

A: Actually, we only need an average of seven per cent and not eight per cent annual economic growth and this is not too high a figure because, in the past 20 years, we grew at 6.7 per cent a year. Thus, we only need an additional 0.3 per cent growth and we had proven this for eight consecutive years. We have the ability to grow higher than eight per cent. In fact, even an average growth less than seven per cent will achieve a seven per cent annual growth.

Q: Does the thrust for future economic growth take into account the fact that we have to maintain that rate?

A: We must always be mindful of the development around the world which is closely linked to our economic growth because Malaysia is a trading country whose economic growth depends on our ability to produce goods for exports and manufacturing. Thus, if we are aware of what is happening in and outside of our market, we could make the necessary adjustments. I am confident we can.

Q: One of the thrusts of the Seventh Malaysia Plan is the emphasis on exports. We also have the impression that we can export, for example, more goods and services. Can Datuk Seri comment on this?

A: Our population is not big. Now it is about 20 million, but 20 million with quite a low income. So, we do not have a large domestic market. We have to use the global market. We have to use our own strength especially since our cost of living is low and although we may get low wages, our standard of living is not low. We can use this as a competitive edge to enable our products to be produced at cheaper cost but with high quality.

Q: Datuk Seri, you have often raised the question of productivity and stressed that one of the missing links from the smart partnership is the total involvement of workers and trade unions. What is the effect on future programmes if this problem cannot be overcome?

A: It can be overcome if we really want to do it. Productivity is not something which is difficult to achieve. What is only needed from us is the will to work hard and, secondly, our determination to upgrade our skills. This we can do. The problem faced by developed nations now is that their workers demand more pay while their productivity decreases; they more often than not asked for higher wages but at the same time want less working hours, long leave and all sorts of leave and all kinds of benefits that contributed to the increase in cost. We are lucky because their workers are doing so and this makes us competitive.

Q: Datuk Seri, there are views that you are fond of building monuments -- Bakun, KLCC, KL Tower, Putrajaya. Would you want to comment on this?

A: It is not my intention to build monuments. I don't think monuments are necessary for me. But for a country we must have something which we can be proud of as a landmark. We say that our country has developed but there is nothing to show the signs of development that the people can see. So when we have a tower at least we know we have a tower and this is something which the people can be proud of, not me. I don't need any monuments. There is only one monument, the low one that we want later. Sometimes the tall

ones that we built are monuments but nonetheless all are facilities, facilities for our country's development, infrastructure. An airport is an infrastructure. Our airports can no longer cater for all aircraft which fly to Subang. Bakun, we need electricity, energy, power. The KL Tower was not built just for us to go up, mere decoration. It is used for telecommunications. The KLCC, we don't have much land in KL, KL is small. The price of land is too high. If we build a hut on this prime land definitely it's a waste. So we built KLCC to maximise from the cost of land.

Q: Datuk Seri, in your opinion do you think the people understand the implication of Malaysia becoming a developed country?

A: Yes, most of us have not really fully understood. Many think that a developed country means higher income. To be truly developed we must have the ability in all fields, our own ability in producing something, having industries. In cultural aspects, I have said that it would be meaningless if we become a developed country if we still have the habit of throwing rubbish all around us with no regard to the environment. We don't realise that cleanliness is what, as the Malay saying goes, "ada harta, tidak ada erti" (have wealth but no meaning). We want to have wealth and at the same know how to manage it.

Q: Datuk Seri, your book "The Malay Dilemma", among other things, deals with several aspects of the Malays. Do you see any major difference between the Malays in the book, which I believe was written in the 50s, with the present Malays?

A: I find the Malays now are more aggressive, sometimes too aggressive, so much so that campaigns for posts are carried out to such an unpleasant extent. However, they no longer feel they lack something, no inferiority complex. Many of them believe that what others can do they can also do, and this is the difference between the Malays during the era we were fighting for independence, when many Malays then were not confident that we can gain independence and rule on our own. Now we are confident that we can rule our country better than before, in fact better than some developed countries. We also believe that if we are willing to take up challenges, we can overcome them.

Q: Datuk Seri, you also raised several theories and observations about the Malays in your book which, perhaps, are no longer valid. Among others, the question of marriage between cousins and the environment can retard one's mental development. Perhaps there are theories in the book which you yourself would like to debunk or question.

A: Yes, maybe my analysis then was inaccurate and the factor that I mentioned, i.e. genetic, was not that correct. But the practice of marriage between cousins is no more widespread because now we look for our own partner, not like in those days when our parents looked for suitors among immediate families. So, we cannot say for sure that what I said in the book were wrong, we don't have the statistics on this. But I'm positive if we were not sure then that the Malays could overcome the weaknesses in their culture, today we can see they are capable of it.

Q: One of the reasons why your book was banned was because it was too frank. You criticised the political leadership at that time. Is it possible that during your 15 years in office you unconsciously repeated some of the

mistakes mentioned in the book?

A: It is possible. I don't want to rule that out, but it is up to the people to make observations because I can't judge myself. Even if you look in the mirror your right side will become your left and vice-versa. So it is not totally true. But I always give serious consideration to other people's criticisms.

Q: There seems to be a hidden agenda when you talk about the need for the Malays to uplift their status to give them dignity and pride. This implies that the Malays are looked down upon. Do you think this is still an issue?

A: I come from a generation that went through four colonial masters -- the British, Japanese, Thai and again under British Military Administration. So, I really know how it feels to be looked down upon. On the other hand we no longer have to bow and address others as "tuan" and, in fact, some of us are now talking about Malay supremacy and so on. If you are already the master, so be it and we don't have to brag about it. In fact, we've been able to redeem our dignity through our achievements. You shouldn't demand respect from people; you have to earn it. Others will not respect us if we demand it. What is important is our achievement. If we have proven our capability, automatically others will respect us and thus our dignity is preserved.

Q: In this context, I would like to ask Datuk Seri a hypothetical question. Will the Malays be better off if the country is politically-dominated by the Chinese like the Chinese are being better off now with the political power in the hands of the Malays?

A: That is difficult for us to answer but I think most Chinese, they are pragmatic. Of course, if they constitute 80 per cent of the population of this country I think the Malays should worry but in this present situation the Malays are 56 per cent of the Malaysian population while the Chinese are only 32 per cent. The Chinese, being pragmatic, would not do something which would eventually jeopardise themselves.

Q: I would like to touch on privatisation. Datuk Seri, a lot of countries have failed to implement privatisation programmes but Malaysia is being looked upon as a model by many countries. What is the thrust of the country's privatisation in future taking into consideration all the successes and weaknesses?

A: We have to look at privatisation as a tool to achieve justice in our rapid development. That's why we imposed two conditions when we decided to privatise government departments, that is, the workers should not be retrenched. Secondly, their pay should not be less attractive than what they were getting in the government; in fact it should be better. This is a good basis which enabled our workers to accept privatisation; in fact, they asked to be privatised. When the attitude is right and suitable with privatisation, then the possibility of privatisation succeeding is better than measures taken by other countries which, for example, reduce the size of their workforce as a step to reduce a company's expenditure, which we don't do here.

Q: There are critics saying that many of these privatisation programmes are only awarded to a small group of individuals or companies. What is your

comment on this?

A: If we list out who benefits from privatisation, we will see that many have benefited from privatisation. I admit that not all will get it because each time there is one, many will bid for it and we have to consider each and everyone of their abilities. We cannot give the project to those with less capability because it will surely fail. But when we receive a proposal from those with good track records, we will give it to them. They are not small in number. Many have built roads, not only PLUS. Others also have the opportunity.

Q: Is it possible, Datuk Seri, that to ensure a company or a group of individuals does not monopolise an economic activity that is to be privatised, an anti-trust law should be introduced like in many other countries?

A: We have not reached that stage yet. Actually, the number of our people, especially Bumiputeras, who have the capability is not many. If we try to limit them too often, then others who might be less capable would also be affected.

Q: Privatisation has definitely brought a lot of benefits from the point of transferring the government's burden to the private sector but how about the burden which had to be borne by the consumers, for example? This is because one of the problems arising from privatisation is that the companies involved do not take into consideration the need of the consumers or the majority of the people or that companies that made extraordinary profits do not reduce their tariff, etc. What is your opinion on this social responsibility which should be carried out by the companies concerned?

A: Actually our choice is either to have or not to have. The government cannot afford, so if we still want the government to do it so that the people would not be burdened with anything, maybe the people may not get anything at all because we cannot afford. So, for us to ensure that we still have it we must accept the fact that the people share a bit of the responsibility. Even then we reduce as much as possible. For instance, the North-South Expressway. Actually, the toll that we pay is very low. In Japan, for example, each kilometre is RM1. Here, it's only a few sen. The reason for the cheaper rate is because when the government transferred its asset, we did not charge according to the market rate, but at a nominal price. This nominal price is not only to assist the company but also to help the people so that they are not charged heavily before the company makes profits. That is the reason why the government is seen to be giving a lot of opportunities to companies. The opportunities are channelled to the people.

Q: I would like to touch on the poem "Perjuangan Yang Belum Selesai" (The Unfinished Struggle) and I quote a verse which goes, "Tears have no meaning. Past history is meaningless, if a beloved nation is neglected, ridiculed and forgotten. What prompted a Prime Minister to write as such?

A: I have been through that era. I have seen Malays being kicked by others for not respecting the colonial national anthem. I have seen Malays being looked down upon, called 'boy' by foreigners, and regarded as incompetent, good for nothing and even when we want to do business we will be asked whether we have done business before. When we say 'no', the reply

was 'huh, you can't do business'. Therefore, we were forever downtrodden and humiliated. I really felt humiliated.

Q: Datuk Seri, we agree that the Malays' success today is spectacular and you yourself have often raised the possibility of a 'backlash' resulting from their achievement. If they are poor, perhaps they could manage and accept it as fate but can the Malays handle their success?

A: If we don't, if responsible leadership, for example, had not reminded us all on the importance of us not forgetting our past, I don't think we could have handled our success because managing success is just as problematic as managing poverty or our past failures. But we often remind ourselves and hope the younger generation will be told of their roots.

Q: Datuk Seri, I would like to touch on racial unity in the country and one of the obvious aspect of Malaysia's success is because of our ability to manage the problem of racial unity. What is your vision, your hope on the issue of racial unity? Will it end or be resolved in the future?

A: Times change. In the past our focus was on assimilation. There is no more effort on assimilation. In fact, in the United States, they always talk about going back to their roots. Thus, if we want to go back to assimilation, it would be difficult. If we have accepted that it is not possible, we must seek other ways to bridge the gap between races. To quote De Bono's Lateral Thinking, 'If we can't cross a road, we take a different path to get to the same destination'.

Q: Is it not possible that due to economic and political stability, the issue of racial unity has been sidelined but will re-emerge if economic recession and political problems return?

A: Certainly it is possible if there is a recession. However, I hope that if there is a recession, there would not be any racial disparity. The Chinese will face problems, so will the Malays and the Indians, too. Therefore, there won't be any ill-feelings and jealousy simply because others are better off than us.

Q: Singapore's former Prime Minister mentioned 'meritocracy' as one of the preconditions if Malaysia and Singapore were to be reunited. Is it possible to have a situation where 'affirmative action' and social engineering such as the New Economic Policy do not exist? Is the situation possible anywhere else in the world, Datuk Seri?

A: I think that it is not possible because the system in one country differs from another. So is the culture and the approach. We have to adopt an approach suited to a particular place and situation.

Q: Datuk Seri, as a result of economic success, we have come to a point where unemployment no longer exists in the country. However, the implication is that we have to bring in many foreign workers, legal or illegal ones. We now have more than a million immigrant workers resulting in other problems. What lessons can we learn from this experience, Datuk Seri?

A: This is a problem of success. Our plan initially was to focus on creating job opportunities. We did not take into account the government's income and, in fact, we were willing to waive tax on companies as long as

they could provide jobs. Suddenly, all our people were already employed and we are not prepared for this. We cannot abruptly halt industries that are in need of labour. Thus, we have no choice but to go on with it and accept foreign labour. Meanwhile, we are paying more attention on upgrading our labour force to undertake less labour-intensive jobs. This will mean that workers will receive higher pay and reduce our dependence on labour from other countries.

Q: Datuk Seri, Singapore also imported foreign labour in the 1960s when they were developing the country. However, only a few of the foreigners ended up residing there or becoming Singapore citizens. Maybe this will not be the case in Malaysia. What are your views?

A: We are larger in size, thus it is harder for us to monitor our borders compared to Singapore. We cannot do it their way. Furthermore, we need foreign labour and when they are allowed into the country, various kinds of unhealthy activities crept in.

Q: During your recent visit to the Kyrgyz Republic, Malaysia had been offered for the first time to conduct a thorough study on the different aspects of the republic. Does this mean that we are now able to export our expertise?

A: It is a learning process. The communist system is very different from ours. Everything is subsidised -- lifestyles, transportation, food, houses. Now, they want to enter the market system, and this is very difficult for them. We want to know what is the best mechanism for them. If we could learn this, then we can be more effective in our own national administration. At the same time, we can help Kyrgyz to overcome the problem of 'mental block' in their people who all this while believed that it is the government's responsibility to provide jobs and subsidise everything. As a result, goods produced are not used but they continue the production just to create jobs.

Q: Datuk Seri, wherever we have followed you on your visits, we journalists always hear of Malaysia being a model admired by other countries. Does it mean that we can now be a consultant to most developing countries?

A: I think a lot of agencies in the world, including the World Bank, realise that Malaysia's achievement is extraordinary and can be a model to other developing countries and many developing countries also feel likewise. So if they ask us how we progressed we should tell and don't hide it from them. There's nothing to gain if we refuse to reveal. If they can use it, let it be.

Q: Datuk Seri, one of Malaysia's successes is that we have become a new economic force, at least in this region, among developing countries. Although we are very vocal in the world arena to champion international issues, the fact remains we are still small in terms of military strength. Are we also interested to become a new military force in the future?

A: No, because we do not believe in solving problems through military ways. We believe more in diplomacy, especially as we want to be friendly with everybody. At the same time, we have given notice to all that we want to be friends, but if anybody wants to do the wrong thing, we should be given the freedom to advise them as much as they feel they are free to

advise us. That is democracy.

Q: I would like to draw Datuk Seri's attention to Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC). What do you expect Malaysia to gain from the Information Technology in the future?

A: This is what I've said in the beginning on the importance for us to be aware of developments taking place in the world. We know that we are now moving from the Industrial Age to the Information Age. We must know the meaning of Information Age and its effects on the country's economy, on our people. With the MSC, we have taken a positive step to bring our country abreast with the changes that we could not avoid, that is, changes from the Industrial Age to the Information Age.

Q: Datuk Seri, during the Multimedia Asia '96 exhibition recently you painted a scenario of an electronic government. Isn't this something scary?

A: Actually in the old days, the government was so secretive from the people even to the extent of not recording anything to prevent the people from knowing what they were doing. But when the government becomes bigger, they could no longer rule by word of mouth and had to write down and this meant others will be able to know the secret. Now we have reached a stage whereby government activities have become enormous and have to move rapidly. We can no longer write, we can no longer type, we have to use computers. We must know how to communicate with others through computers. A system must be developed to ensure all our notes, our records and our business are saved. Then only can we compete with others who will use the system. Otherwise, we will be left behind.

Q: Do you feel we are now ready to create an intelligent society and paperless society and moving towards a digital economy?

A: I think if we make a decision that we have to face this matter, the questions regarding our attitude, training, skills, will depend on our willingness to learn. This is not a mystery. I've often said that there is no mystery in the ability of the Westerners, such as in engineering or other fields. If we want to learn, we too can do what they do.

Q: Datuk Seri, recently you met Bill Gates, the owner of Microsoft, and usually people like them do not have an eye for developing countries. But what were Bill Gates' views on the multimedia programme and our plans in Information Technology?

A: We must remember that Bill Gates was poor before and began his work in a car garage and he may now still believe that anything starts from small. So even though he considers us small, maybe he thinks that there is a likelihood of us becoming big. That's why he is concentrating on a small area in the world which is still developing rapidly.

Q: Another thing, Datuk Seri. Regarding the question of multimedia and Information Technology. Are we not progressing too fast?

A: We cannot wait for the normal transition. While the Industrial Revolution in the West took 200 years, we cannot wait 200 years. We have to move faster and I believe that if we have the ability, we can chase others until we are on par with them.

Q: Some of our people are still contending with the problem of basic amenities. Don't you think we may talk of different agenda?

A: Yes, although you can provide basic amenities to all we must bear in mind that when the computer was invented, the inventors thought that the world needed only five computers. It never crossed their mind that everyone can own a computer which is more powerful than the old computer of the size of three rooms. The day will come when the prices of these computers will come down further. Even today they have gone down and our incomes have gone up. If we work hard, InsyaAllah, we can own all the equipment there are.

Q: Datuk Seri, everywhere people have started to talk about losing faith in political parties but Umno continues to remain strong. After 50 years, it is still gaining strength and expanding. What is the secret of Umno's success?

A: In my opinion, Umno has a form of discipline, i.e., the willingness to accept an ordinary member to be a leader and being loyal to the leadership. In the Malay cultural system, we tend to look at one's status. If one is a king, his son could inherit the throne and whether he is capable or not will not be questioned. But Umno practises a political culture that recognises one's right to lead the party if he has certain capabilities, for instance, making himself popular and competent.

Q: What is the quality of Umno members today, Datuk Seri? Is it true that the spirit of volunteerism and sacrifice have faded? And efforts are geared only to attaining something or to serving an interest?

A: I don't deny that there is to some extent a decline in quality as Umno has grown in size. Usually, when you have something in plenty, the quality tends to be lower. When we struggled against the Malayan Union and to gain our Independence, the number of Umno members hardly reached 100,000. But they were so dedicated and they shook the world. As Sukarno had said if he could get 10 strong young men, he could shake the world. In democracy, we do need numbers and numbers are important in winning an election, for instance. In fact, in 1987, some people thought we should have an elitist party, i.e., a small party but with a big following who are non-card carrying members. That is one opinion, but we find there is no commitment unless one becomes a member. By being a member, he has commitment although he may not have the quality.

Q: I wonder what is the formula from within that can destroy Umno, Datuk Seri?

A: I believe that if we are too pre-occupied with gaining positions to the extent of resorting to corrupt practices, the party and the country will be destroyed as those elected were corruptly chosen and they in turn will choose from among those who accept bribes and eventually the Prime Minister will be a corrupt one. So, the country will go to pieces but I am confident that so far we have been able to handle this matter.

Q: The Supreme Council recently made a decision that there is no need to have activities, programmes and so on for the October party elections. Have we come to the stage that we can't even trust our members, Datuk Seri?

A: We need to respond to what is taking place. If we stick to a standard way without considering its implications, like some Western

nations that practised democracy as if it's a religion. They faced a lot of problems and many other countries also faced problems because of democracy. We must take into account when democracy is abused. We should take measures which appear to be less democratic in order to save the democratic system itself. That's why we banned all forms of campaigning.

Q: Datuk Seri, all your grand plans, ideas and vision will be meaningless if the person taking over the reins of leadership from you lacks the same vision that you have. Do you have full confidence in the person designated to succeed you?

A: We always have discussions and I think Umno's stand is not mine alone but the outcome of our talks in the party which we endorsed. This is how the party is managed and I'm confident if I'm no longer in the party, it would continue to be managed, perhaps with a different style but the objective is the same.

Q: Why is it that there are so many theories of conspiracy about your relationship with Datuk Seri Anwar so much so that you and him often had to make various statements to ease the situation?

A: Our people are so obsessed with this conspiracy theory, looking for the hidden motives when there is no motive at all. The matter is as it appears, nothing more than that. But we Malays in particular like to read too much into things. But we Malays in particular like to read too much into things. If he gives me something, what is his motive? We always ask this question. We should, in fact, accept it at face value. I had to repeatedly clarify this matter because I found that it created all sorts of uneasy situations in the party. In fact, I am confident Datuk Seri Anwar can take over from me without causing any adverse effects to Umno and he will not force me to step down.

Q: Datuk Seri, had you ever doubted Datuk Seri Anwar's loyalty and sincerity?

A: At times when you are inundated with all kinds of reports, you get the feeling that it may be true. I think whether I believe it or not, one day I have to withdraw from the post. And if I do not have trust in the person who is to succeed me, it is quite difficult for me to communicate with him.

Q: Datuk Seri, we've heard that it is not easy to be the number two man to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Anwar is now undergoing a test to prove his ability. Do you think that he is able to continue what you have done all along this far?

A: I think he is able but obviously he is different from me. I don't believe he will be 100 per cent like me. Nobody can be me 100 per cent and I too cannot be 100 per cent Anwar.

Q: In any third world country, the leaders are criticised for bringing their children into politics and business. Do you set any conditions, limits or controls for your children's involvement in politics or business?

A: Actually, I do. To the extent that sometimes I infuriate my children because I say don't do this and that. I don't at all give them space in politics and I don't help them even if they have the interest. One of them

is keen but I'm not going to help him. That is his business. But then, it will be unfair for me to stop him. But to say that I want to push him forward, no, I don't do that. Likewise in business, if they want to do business, they can. But as far as possible, they should not involve the government. If they want to do business, do it with others.

Q: The question often asked is who is the real Dr Mahathir. Many thought you have been largely influenced by political philosophers like Machiavelli, Karl Von Clausewitz and the like. And that you are also influenced by Sun Tzu. But are there any beliefs that influenced your politics all this while?

A: I believe what have influenced my politics is after studying the history of several backward countries and that they would not remain backward forever and that developed countries also would not be advanced forever. Given the correct action a backward country can progress and if we observe the history of nations of the world, we'll find that at one time or other they were once backward. The British, for example, are from people who once were cavemen, who suddenly rose to build an empire. So were the Greek, Romans and even Russia during the time of Peter the Great was once looked upon as very backward. But Peter the Great changed all that and turned Russia into a world power during his time. Therefore in my opinion, if we are willing to develop the nation and use the experience of earlier leaders who took their countries out of backwardness to progress, I think we can achieve progress. We don't have to know much about Clausewitz or Machiavelli. Actually, I only know their names but I have not read Clausewitz and Machiavelli.

Q: Was there any setback during the last 15 years you have been in office?

A: Yes, there were frustrations, sometimes when we want to do something right, accusations were hurled against us. Sometimes when we ask that something not be done, our advice was not heeded. For example, when we talk about moral decline and drug abuse among Malay children. This frustrated me because we have not even reached the level of development where we can relax. It seems even before reaching that level we are already obsessed with aping westerners. We don't emulate the good from them but the bad. This frustrated me.

Q: What has been your most beautiful moment as Prime Minister thus far?

A: The most beautiful experience is seeing our country develop and display our ability, especially that of the Malays in attaining the level that we have reached now. Actually, my dream before becoming Prime Minister was to look at pictures in the Straits Times of Malay executives being promoted. That was my big ambition then but now such a thing is very common. This is most heartening. -- BERNAMA

ES RN YBY