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Paper praises our policies

BEIRUT, Mon: Malaysia's pragmatic policies and economic success were highlighted today in the Daily Star, a Lebanese daily newspaper. In an editorial entitled "The Malaysian model", the paper described Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who arrived here today for an official visit, as "a man of vision" and a pragmatic leader."

It said: "At times, Dr Mahathir has combined the best of Western economic values with anti-Western rhetoric. Indeed at 71, he has become the master of the craft."

The editorial quoted the prime minister as saying "If you can't fight them, join them" and "You cannot avoid Hollywood. That's exactly why we're here," he said when promoting the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) earlier this year.

But this, according to the Daily Star, reflects the reality of Malaysia as an Eastern, Muslim country which cherishes its traditions and culture, and yet realises that success in the modern, global economy depends on the free flow of information and trade, on the innovation and on the successful anticipation of market trends.

Malaysian planners are well aware that its reserves of oil and gas will last for only another 15 to 20 years. The editorial also touched on the world's tallest buildings - the Petronas Twin Towers and the "biggest project still", the MSC.

According to the editorial, Lebanese leaders have important lessons to learn from Dr Mahathir and Malaysia. First and most importantly, the world is a rapidly changing plane where technological transformation must be embraced wholeheartedly and with imagination - on an optional extra.

Secondly, that successful economies seek to open up the flow of trade and information rather than close them down - whether consciously through imposing tariffs to "protect" domestic industry or create "self-sufficiency", or through a slothful failure to tackle Customs inefficiencies or the violation of intellectual property rights.

Thirdly, economic success is not dependent on a slavish copying of all things Western. It is possible to pick out what is appropriate or beneficial. Growth does not mean accepting environmental degradation nor rising crime.

The editorial adds that the contrast between Lebanese government policies on these questions with those of Malaysia well illustrate how far the world is changing. "It well illustrates too the nature of the challenge which Lebanon faces. It would be well for our political class to use Dr Mahathir's visit as a cue for some deep and careful reflection."

Referring to the inaugural meeting the Developing-8 (D-8) meeting which ended in Istanbul yesterday, the editorial said Dr Mahathir could "hold his head very high." It said the signs are good that the D-8 will seek to combine cooperation between its members with further economic liberalisation. D-8 groups Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, Egypt, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Even so, it adds that the summit's host, Turkey's Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, "must look enviously at the Malaysian model where the country's Islamic character seems to marry so smoothly with commercial success and rapid modernisation."

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