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Keys to progress

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BUY BRITISH LAST

One of Dr Mahathir's earliest moves as Prime Minister was the implementation of his 'Buy British Last' campaign, which lasted for the good part of the 1980s. The events leading up to this rather shocking policy included decisions by the country's former colonial master: skyrocketing fees for Malaysian and other foreign students in Britain, restricted landing rights at London's Heathrow Airport and the British's 'hostile' reaction to the Permodalan Nasional Bhd's (PNB) 'dawn raid' on the London Stock Exchange on Sept 7, 1981, which allowed the PNB to gain control of British plantation conglomerate Guthrie.

Looking at the bigger picture, the philosophy behind the policy was to get Malaysians to shed their colonial mentality. It was a timely move for the nation to move from over-dependence on the West and its 'Anglo-American orientation' in technology and business excellence. The Prime Minister reverted to the policy again in 1994, for seven months, banning British firms from bidding for Malaysian Government contracts after British Press reports alleged corruption in Anglo-Malaysian trade deals.