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Dr M `has struck better balance'

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has struck a better balance between development and conservation than many Southeast Asian nations, leading conservationist David Bellamy told Reuters.

Dr Mahathir's administration has seen Malaysians grow richer than all their neighbours except Singapore, meaning that habitats like coral reefs face less pressure than those of Indonesia and the Philippines.

"In some ways he's been the whipping boy for one model of development which gets it right for the local people," Bellamy said during a visit marking the start of a coral reef research project on peninsular Malaysia's east coast.

"I think if I was him I would go into my retirement moderately proud of what I'd done," said the British scientist and film-maker, once arrested at an Australian anti-dam protest.