

MAHATHIR-FOREST

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KUALA LUMPUR, AUG. 29 (BERNAMA) -- DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI (DR.) MAHATHIR MOHAMAD WARNED TODAY THAT UNCONTROLLED EXPLOITATION OF FORESTS WOULD DEplete THE NATION'S TIMBER RESOURCES IN 12 YEARS TIME.

DESCRIBING IT AS A CRISIS IN THE ECONOMIC GROWTH OF THE COUNTRY HE SAID IF THE SITUATION WAS PROLONGED IT WOULD HAVE SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS ON THE NATION'S ECONOMY.

BY 1990, THE RATE OF TIMBER PRODUCTION WOULD NOT BE SUFFICIENT TO MEET LOCAL DEMAND, THE TIMBER EXPORT INDUSTRY WOULD COLLAPSE AND MOST TIMBER FACTORIES WOULD HAVE TO BE CLOSED, HE ADDED.

+THEN, WE WILL BE FORCED TO IMPORT TIMBER AND THIS WILL REDUCE OUR FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNINGS, WE WILL ALSO LOSE THE MONEXH INVESTED IN THE TIMBER INDUSTRY, + HE SAID WHEN OPENING A MEETING OF THE NATIONAL INDUSTRY, + HE SAID, FORESTRY COUNCIL HERE

THE MEETING -- ATTENDED BY ALL MENTERIS BESAR, CHIEF MINISTERS OR THEIR REPRESENTATIVES AND FIVE CABINET MINISTERS -- WILL HAVE EIGHT MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION, INCLUDING THE NATIONAL FORESTRY POLICY.

-- BERNAMA MORE 1503/SZ

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DATUK SERI (DR.) MAHATHIR SAID POSITIVE STEPS MUST BE ADOPTED TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF THE CURRENT CRISIS.

+I BELIEVE WE STILL HAVE THE ABILITY, RESOURCES AND SINCERITY TO TAKE APPROPRIATE STEPS AND ACTION FOR THE SAKE OF OUR COMMON INTERESTS, + HE ADDED.

THE DEPUTY PRIM MINISTER FELT THAT THE LIFE OF THE FORESTS COULD BE EXTENDED BY 35 YEARS IF FOREST LAND WAS CLEARED FOR AGRICULTURE AT THE REQUIRED RATE OF ABOUT 140,000 ACRES A YEAR INSTEAD OF THE PRESENT AVERAGE RATE OF 680,000 ACRES.

DATUK SERI (DR.) MAHATHIR POINTED OUT THAT THE TIMBER INDUSTRY IN THE COUNTRY BEGAN IN THE 1930S AND DEVELOPED FAST.

THE INDUSTRY NOW BROUGHT OUT VARIOUS PRODUCTS AND OFFERED EMPLOYMENT DIRECTLY TO ABOUT 50,000 PEOPLE AND INDIRECTLY TO THOUSANB MORE. -- BERNAMA MORE 1505/SZ

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+WE MUST BEAR IN MIND HOW SERIOUS THE IMPLICATIONS WILL BE TO THE NATION'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC STABILITY IF THE TIMBER INDUSTRY SUFFERS+, HE SAID.

UNCONTROLLED OPENING OF FOREST LAND IN THE LAST SIX YEARS HAD CAUSED ABOUT 5.5 MILLION ACRES OF LAND TO BE CLEARED AND LAST YEAR ALONE 1.015 MILLION ACRES WERE LOGGED, HE ADDED.

ACCORDING TO DATUK SERI (DR.) MAHATHIR, THOUGH 4.1 MILLION ACRES OF THE CLEARED LAND WERE FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, THE REMAINING 1.4 MILLION ACRES NEED NOT HAVE BEEN OPENED IMMEDIATELY.

DATUK SERI (DR.) MAHATHIR SAID ONLY 540,000 ACRES OF PERMANENT FOREST RESERVES HAD COME UNDER REAFFORESTATION IN THE PAST 20 YEARS.

THE FIGURE WAS LOW COMPARED WITH THE AVERAGE 680,000 ACRES LOGGED ANNUALLY, HE SAID.

IN THE LAST SIX YEARS, ABOUT 1.4 MILLION ACRES OF FOREST LAND HAD BEEN LOGGED COMPARED WITH 125,000 ACRES THAT HAD BEEN REHABILITATED, HE ADDED. -- BERNAMA MORE 1525/SZ

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THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SAID THE MEETING WOULD DISCUSS AN IMPORTANT WORKING PAPER - THE NATIONAL FORESTRY POLICY - AS A STEP TOWARDS SOLVING THE CURRENT PROBLEMS.

THE NATIONAL FORESTRY COUNCIL WAS STILL DISCUSSING A DRAFT OF THE NATIONAL FORESTRY POLICY DESPITE BEING FORMED SIX YEARS AGO, HE ADDED.

HE HOPED THE MEETING WOULD ACCEPT THE DRAFT UNANIMOUSLY AND AVOID ANY POSTPONEMENT.

THE MEETING WOULD ALSO STUDY A WORKING PAPER ON THE REVIEW OF FORESTRY LAWS.

THE PROVISIONS CONTAINED IN THE LAWS INTRODUCED 40 YEARS AGO WERE OUTDATED AND HAD WEAKENED THE ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY, HE SAID.

THE PROVISIONS NEED TO BE REVISED TO SUIT THE CURRENT DEVELOPMENT ASPECTS, HE ADDED. --BERNAMA MORE 1551/MD

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DR. MAHATHIR SAID THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WAS WILLING TO SPONSOR FOREST REHABILITATION WORK IF THE STATE GOVERNMENTS WERE PREPARED TO MAKE THE AREAS WHERE REHABILITATION WAS CARRIED OUT AS PERMANENT FOREST RESERVES. -- BERNAMA 1555/SZ