

Penans blamed for forest destruction All due to shifting cultivation: PM

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SUNGAI BULOH, Mon. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the Penans of Sarawak were largely to blame for destroying the forests due to extensive shifting cultivation.

He also said that the campaign mounted by the Europeans against Malaysian tropical hardwood is one-sided and baseless as Malaysia is always aware and conscious of its precious forest resources.

"The Europeans should blame the Penans instead of the Government for destroying the forests but of course, they would rather blame the Government and logging concessionaires," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the Penans should stop moving place to place for shifting cultivation but instead stay in one area and manage the land properly.

"They move from one area to another for shifting cultivation for padi planting and this has created bare patches in the jungle which are visible from the air.

"After three to four years, the Penans move and destroy another big area in the forest."

Dr Mahathir added that Malaysia was

doing all it could to conserve and manage its tropical rain forests — and it did not have to explain this to anybody.

"When we give logging concessions, we do not allow all the trees to be logged. We mark mature trees for logging and let the smaller ones grow and in another 20 to 30 years, we will still have a forest," he said.

Speaking to reporters at a Press conference after visiting the Rubber Research Institute Experimental Station (RRIES), Dr Mahathir also said the Europeans would like the Penans in Sarawak to live below subsistence level.

Not arrested

He added: "They would like the Penans to use blowpipes for them to gawk at.

"The Penans are not a showpiece, neither are they there for the Europeans to do their anthropological theses on; they need to live like human beings," he said when answering questions on the mounting campaign in Europe against the use of Malaysian tropical hardwood.

On the question of Swiss fugitive Bruno Manser's influence on the Europeans and

the Penans, Dr Mahathir said Manser was still thinking in terms of the White Rajah.

"He should have come with the White Rajah Brooke but I think he is a bit late for that. And if the Europeans would like to study the real Penan, they should study him instead as the Penans would like to live normally," he said.

On why Manser has not been arrested, Dr Mahathir said it was a bit difficult as the "jungle is big".

"But he will be arrested," he added.

Primary Industries Minister Datuk Dr Lim Keng Yaik, who was also present, said Malaysia would counter the anti-tropical hardwood campaign.

He said a timber mission would be going to Europe soon armed with proper information on Malaysian tropical rain forest management.

He also said the campaign against Malaysian tropical hardwood could have been mounted by the European Soft-Wood Association.

"I have a sneaking suspicion that they are responsible for it," he said.