

Shifting cultivators destruct forests, says Mahathir

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad yesterday defended the approval of logging activities by the Government amid recent criticisms by certain European conservationist groups in their worldwide "Save the Forest" campaign.

Speaking to reporters after visiting the Rubber Research Institute of Malaysia research centre in Sungai Buluh, he said it is the shifting cultivators who actually destruct the forest.

Datuk Dr Seri Mahathir said in attacking the Government, the Western campaigners were merely trying to become so-called heroes. They should get angry with the shifting cultivators instead.

"When we give out licences, we mark the trees that can be cut down. Therefore, even after logging, there will be trees which are allowed to grow to maturity in, say, 20 years or so," he said.

Thus, he added, the forest areas in Peninsular Malaysia have remained forest even after logging activities have completed.

But this is not the case in Sabah and Sarawak where there are large bare patches all over as the shifting cultivators have cut down all the trees for padi and other cultivation.

"We hope our friends in Sabah and Sarawak, the Penans and others, would cultivate in one area and settle there, and not

move around after every three or four years," he said, adding that the Government will continue to persuade these inhabitants to drop this habit.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the Government wants to see these people live in comfort just like other Malaysians. They should not be used by foreigners "for their thesis papers".

Primary Industries Minister Datuk Dr Lim Keng Yaik said the Malaysian Timber Industry Board (MTIB) will send a mission to several European countries to explain what the country is doing with its forests.

A film, made with the cooperation of Radio Television Malaysia, will be taken along, showing the reforestation activities of the authorities.