

All must share environmental burden: PM

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad called on developed and developing nations to share the burden of keeping the environment livable, but said the sharing must be fair and according to the means of each country.

He said the environment had now become a matter of grave concern to everyone and its deterioration could no longer be ignored and urgent solutions must be found.

"Unfortunately, many developed countries seem intent on laying the blame for the world's environmental problems on the developing countries.

"Yet, by any measure, it is the developed countries which have assailed our environment," Dr Mahathir said to applause.

He said nuclear testing, excessive use of fossil fuels, private transportation, release of CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons) into the atmosphere, massive wastage of paper, and toxic chemical disposal were the direct result of the lifestyle of the rich.

Another factor which contributed towards environmental decline was poverty "but it is only because the poor cannot help themselves."

The poor could not be denied the few resources that they had because if they were, they would become poorer and this would cause even greater environmental degradation, he said.

On the other hand, the rich can afford not only to reduce their waste-generating lifestyle but can expand more on re-afforestation of the agricultural land they had wrested from their forests.

"With their technology and their wealth they can actually make millions of acres of desert bloom," he said.

Dr Mahathir said unfortunately the line taken by environmentalists was to lay the blame on poor countries and sought to force them to slow down their development in the interest of restoring the environment which the rich had polluted.

The Prime Minister said the Commonwealth could help by bringing some sanity and balance to the current debate.

Dr Mahathir also said the laxity of some countries had caused the drug habit to spread.

And along with the drug habit would come AIDS, he said.

"Those who advocate leniency are guilty of spreading AIDS as well. We must act now," he said to laughter from the audience.