

# Groups behind anti-hardwood campaign: PM

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said groups with vested interests in the soft-timber industry are behind a campaign against Malaysia's tropical hardwood.

The Prime Minister said today that after brushing aside a bruising campaign against tropical oils "which singles out our palm oil particularly," Malaysia was now faced with this campaign against another of its commodity exports.

"Malaysia takes a serious view of the campaign," he said when opening the first meeting of the Malaysia-United States Private Sector Consultative Group today.

"A legation regarding the destruction of the tropical rainforests and the exploitation of the abode of the Penans sound rather hollow in the face of massive logging in the countries where these conservationists come from and their failure to limit their own extensive

pollution of the environment," he said.

Dr Mahathir reiterated that Malaysia was not without concern for environmental issues but stressed that maintenance of the ecological balance was the responsibility of everyone and not that of the developing countries alone.

He said: "Malaysia is very proud of its natural rainforests. We take great pains to manage them and have spent a significant amount of money and effort to preserve them.

"If, and when, we approve timber concessions, strict conditions are imposed on the logging companies.

"In fact, the natural beauty of our country is one of the most valuable assets which we are selling abroad in our effort to promote Malaysia's tourism industry."

On the Penans, Dr Mahathir said there was nothing "romantic" in their primitive way of life. He said there were

only a few of them remaining in the jungles.

"They are undernourished, prone to all kinds of diseases and have a shorter life-span than the average Malaysian.

"To force them to continue living this primitive way of life is to deny them the benefits of modern medicine and education."

Dr Mahathir said it was cruel to use the Penans "to nut a human face" to a campaign against Malaysia's timber industry merely to drum up support and sympathy.

He said Malaysia was as sensitive as the industrialised countries with regard to the environment.

The recent Langkawi Declaration on Environment, the 1985 Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer which Malaysia supported, were testimony of its concern for the world environment, he said.

"When we extract some much-needed wealth from our forests, you can be assured that we do so with all due consideration for the environment," he added.

Dr Mahathir also said that Malaysia had the ingredients for foreign investors to use as their base to launch into the lucrative markets of the Pacific Rim.

"Malaysia's combination of raw materials, manpower, energy, infrastructure, realistic gov-

ernment policies and attractive incentives provide investors with this base," he said.

With the technological advancement in transportation, distance and national boundaries would no longer present barriers to doing business, he added.

"Globalism will bring more benefit to developing countries like Malaysia. We will give support to global companies," Dr Mahathir said.