

MAHATHIR-CONSERVATION

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**SUBANG, JUNE 12, (BERNAMA)** -- DATUK **SERI DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD** TODAY URGED WEALTHY DEVELOPED COUNTRIES TO SUPPORT THE CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY IN DEVELOPING NATIONS BY NOT IMPOSING RESTRICTIVE BURDENS.

**+WHILE** WE WOULD NOT WISH TO DESTROY BIODIVERSITY, IT MUST BE REMEMBERED THAT PRESERVING IT **IMPOSES A MASSIVE COST,** + THE PRIME MINISTER SAID WHEN OPENING A FIVE-DAY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CONSERVATION OF TROPICAL BIODIVERSITY- HERE.

A WAY MUST BE FOUND TO PRESERVE BIODIVERSITY WITHOUT CAUSING A STANDSTILL IN DEVELOPMENT IN POOR COUNTRIES, HE SAID, NOTING THAT THE MATTER WAS OF GLOBAL CONCERN.

WITH THE PROPOSED BAKUN DAM PROJECT AS AN ILLUSTRATION, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THE GOVERNMENT WAS PREPARED TO FORGO IT FOR THE SAKE OF ENVIRONMENT EVEN THOUGH THE PROJECT WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SUPPLY CHEAP ELECTRICITY FOR THE WHOLE COUNTRY.

THE PROJECT WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GENERATE 3,000 MEGAWATT OF ELECTRICITY -- THE AMOUNT BEING PRESENTLY UTILISED IN THE COUNTRY.

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**+WE** ARE PREPARED TO FORGO THIS VERY CHEAP ELECTRICITY PROJECT WHICH WOULD COST US ABOUT ONE SEN A UNIT AND IF DELIVERED IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA IT IS ONLY SEVEN SEN PER UNIT, + HE SAID.

THE DECISION TO SCRAP THE PROJECT WOULD MEAN THAT THE PEOPLE HAD TO CONTINUE PAYING FOR ELECTRICITY AT A RATE OF BETWEEN 17 AND 24 SEN PER UNIT AS CHARGED BY THE NATIONAL ELECTRICITY BOARD, HE SAID.

**+WHEN** WE SAY WE ARE GOING TO GIVE UP THIS PROJECT, WE ARE PAYING A HIGH COST FOR IT AND THIS IS NOT A RICH COUNTRY.

**+IT** MAY BE BETTER OFF THAN HOST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES BUT IT IS CERTAINLY NOT A DEVELOPED COUNTRY AND BECAUSE OF THAT, THE BURDEN IS VERY HEAVY ON US.

**+THIS** IS A SACRIFICE THAT WE HAVE MADE AND WE HOPE THAT IT IS APPRECIATED THAT WE ARE DOING OUR BIT AT A TREMENDOUS COST FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, + DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID. -- MORE

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ASKED BY REPORTERS LATER, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THE MOVE TO SCRAP THE BAKUN PROJECT WAS ALSO 'MALAYSIA'S CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS PRESERVING THE GLOBAL ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT.

OTHER COUNTRIES, ESPECIALLY THE DEVELOPED NATIONS, NEED TO APPRECIATE THE MALAYSIAN HOPE BY NOT TAKING ACTIONS THAT WOULD PUT THE COUNTRY AT A LOSS, HE SAID.

HE CITED THE CAMPAIGN TO BOYCOTT THE PURCHASE OF MALAYSIAN TROPICAL TIMBER AS AN EXAMPLE THAT HAD RESULTED IN A LOSS TO THE COUNTRY.

HE SAID, IT WAS UNFAIR THAT SUCH A BURDEN WAS BEING PUT ON MALAYSIA MERELY ON GROUNDS THAT THE FOREST IN THIS COUNTRY SHOULD NOT BE UTILISED FOR ECONOMIC PROJECTS.

ON WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT WOULD FIND AN ALTERNATIVE FOR THE BAKUN PROJECT, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO FIND ANOTHER SITE THAT COULD GENERATE HYDRO-ELECTRICITY SUPPLY OF UP TO 3,000 MEGAWATT.

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AND EVEN IF THERE WAS AN **ALTERNATIVE**, THE COST WOULD BE MUCH HIGHER AND THE COUNTRY COULD NOT AFFORD **IT**, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID.

HE SAID THE POTENTIAL FOR HYDRO-ELECTRICITY GENERATION IN SARAWAK WAS 80,000 **MEGAWATT**, ENOUGH TO MEET GREAT BRITAIN'S NEEDS.

**DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR** ALSO SAID THE PERMANENT FOREST ESTATE IN THE **COUNTRY TOTALLED** 12.74 MILLION HECTARES OF WHICH ABOUT 29 PER CENT IS PROTECTED OR **MAINTAINED** AS AMENITY FORESTS.

+THE 12.74 **MILLION HA MAKE** UP ABOUT 38 PER CENT OF THE TOTAL LAND AREA **OF MALAYSIA**. IF TREE PLANTATIONS ARE **INCLUDED**, ABOUT 74 PER CENT OF MALAYSIA IS COVERED BY TREES,+ HE SAID.

THE CONFERENCE IS **ORGANISED** BY THE **MALAYAN NATURE SOCIETY** AS **PART OF ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS** IN COLLABORATION WITH THE **MINISTRY OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT**. -- **BERNAMA**

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