

# Countering campaigns by groups

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# PM calls for

## using environmental issues

# joint stand

**By Ahmad A. Talib and Robert Goh**

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. Asean must co-ordinate its efforts to counter campaigns initiated by some groups using environmental issues to obstruct the economic growth of developing countries. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said this could be done through an information campaign at the international level, and by adopting a common stand on environmental issues.

This would involve financial back-ups. The price for not doing it now would be much higher later.

Dr Mahathir said this when he declared open the 23rd Asean Economic Ministers' Meeting here today.

He said: "Environmental issues have lately come to the fore to join other economic and trade issues which already burden Asean economies. I have spoken at length on these issues in other forums and have pointed out the dangers of using them as leverage in trade negotiations.

"This problem can only be solved by co-operation between developed and developing countries and not through confrontational campaigns by some groups. We in Asean can no longer remain passive and indifferent to these campaigns, hoping that they will in time fizzle away.

"They have assumed serious proportions and are being used to obstruct the economic growth of the developing countries."

The campaign promoters, which includes non-governmental organisations (NGOs), have enormous resources and the support of

the so-called free Western media.

Asean was not unconcerned about environmental pollution, but its capability to deal with it was limited.

Therefore, the developed countries should have a more positive approach rather than threaten to use trade and aid as instruments to force Asean into doing things which would retard the growth of its economy and the well-being of its people.

He cited the case of the current forest fires which have cast a thick haze over

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the region. Forest fires were more damaging than the controlled extraction of timber.

"But whereas the whole world is in a state of uproar over our extraction of tropical timber and threatens to boycott our produce and destroy our economies, there is not a squeak about the forest fires which periodically plague us.

"Perhaps it is because the haze does not spread to their

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## Our chances better if we unite, Asean told

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countries. Perhaps it is because they cannot sound noble as they do when they champion the Penans.

"There is much that is positive that the rich countries of the north can do about our forest fires. They can mount emergency operations to put out the fires. They can fly their massive fleets of water-bombers to dump water on the fires. They can provide heavy equipment and pay for the cutting and removal of trees to create fire-breaks.

"They can do massive cloud-seeding to create rain. Indeed with their ingenuity and wealth, they can put out our fires as they extinguish the oil-well fires in Kuwait with such handsome profits.

"But as we all know none of these things are happening. There is not a word from the environmentalists of the north or their proxies locally.

"On this and other issues and attempts to link non-

trade matters to trade, Asean must speak with one voice and put forth our case with vigour. Individually we will be victims of the global campaigns now being mounted to make us permanent developing countries.

"United we stand a reasonable chance. Allied with other neighbours our chances become even better."

Speaking to newsmen later, Dr Mahathir suggested that Western environmentalists volunteer to put out the forest fires, noting that experts in some Western countries had been able to put out the oil fires in Kuwait after the Gulf War.

The Prime Minister was asked by a Western journalist whether requests had been made to Western countries for help in containing the present fires.

Dr Mahathir said no requests had been made for such assistance, but no requests had been made either for the groups to come to Malaysia (to agitate on environmental issues).