

ACT — DON'T JUST TALK

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West should help
put out forest fires if sincere: PM

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KUALA LUMPUR: Developed countries should initiate emergency operations to stop the forest fires which have caused a haze over the Asean countries if they are sincere about environmental protection, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

While there had not been any formal request for help in putting out the fires, Western nations should do it on their own accord, just like they did on the Penan issue, he said.

"So if they are willing to come and demonstrate about the forest in that way, then they should also volunteer to provide water-bombers and do cloud-seeding without us having to put in a request," he said.

Speaking to reporters after opening the 23rd Asean Economic Ministers meeting here yesterday, Dr Mahathir said Western nations should first address the problems in the treatment of their indigenous peoples.

Commenting on the launching of "World Penan Day" by Western environmentalist groups yesterday, he said:

"The successful model (for treating indigenous people) actually exists and is in America where the Red Indians are totally exterminated.

"They live on reservations and are told that if they do not live on the reservations the land may revert for general usage.

"Look at the plight of the Red Indians and you will understand what will happen to the Penans (if such a model is adopted)."

Dr Mahathir said the Government was trying to

inculcate a culture among the Penans which would, in the long run, give them better prospects for the future.

"But given the chance of having an education and to say that they should get it if they choose to have

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It, is not enough.

"We have **civilisation** forced upon us to a certain extent and the process is still not enough. We are told that we are not democratic enough and people want to ram their democracy down our throats.

"What is wrong with us giving the Penans a culture that will make them like us. Who knows, there may be a **Penan** Prime Minister of Malaysia."

Dr Mahathir said **Asean** should adopt a common stand against the campaigns of the Western non-governmental **organisations** because they were obstructing the economic growth of developing countries.

While the Western world was in an uproar over the extraction of tropical timber, "there is not a squeak about the forest fires which periodically plague us."

"Perhaps it is because they cannot sound noble as they do when they champion the Penans," he said.

The Prime Minister pointed out that the pollution from forest fires was greater than that caused by timber extraction.

"Yet 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 in their massive fleets of **water-bombers** to dump water on the fires. They can do massive cloud-seeding to create rain.

"But, none of these things is happening. There is not a word from the environmentalists of the North or their proxies here."