

Regreen the world, rich countries urged

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SINGAPORE: Malaysia has called on the rich countries to use their financial and technological resources to help regreen the world instead of indulging in rhetoric.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday that with their wealth and technology, it is possible to plant and cover even deserts with trees, including tropical hardwood timber.

"Controlled logging can go on but in a hundred years, there will be three times the present tropical timberland," he said.

Dr Mahathir said if the rich nations were so concerned about depleting tropical forest, then they should do something about forest fires in the tropics.

"It would be a simple

matter for an international body to be set up to catalogue all the rich nations' resources and deploy them to the poor tropical countries in case of a forest fire."

He said this would be much more constructive than "dramatising the acreage of tropical forest destroyed per day or how 300 Penans were being deprived of their million hectares of hunting ground."

Dr Mahathir hit out at some industrialised countries for their anti-tropical forest campaign when they themselves were responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions.

He regretted the undue focus on the tropical forest, saying the rich 20 per cent of the world's population accounted for 80 per cent of the problem.

Thirty per cent of the carbon dioxide emissions came from one industrial power alone, he said.

The Prime Minister said on the other hand, 1.5 billion people live in abject poverty in the developing world.

The Prime Minister said forest fires caused greater damage to the environment than controlled logging.

Developing countries did not have the financial and technological capability to effectively handle forest fires which could rage for weeks and months.

"Certainly, more forests can be saved by preventing forest fires or putting them out quickly than by boycotting the export of tropical timber or advocating that forest dwellers remain in the

forest, eating monkeys and suffering from tropical diseases."

Dr Mahathir also spoke on the dilemma faced by littoral states in curbing pollution and other dangers caused by oil and chemical tankers in the Malacca Straits.

He said there had been collisions and oil spillage on Malaysia's shores, resulting in costly clean-ups and damages to the fishing and tourism industries.

He also touched on a new problem — piracy — where the pirates robbed the crew of cash and valuables, and left them tied up and the ship adrift.

"The ship will sail unguided for hours and may collide with another vessel or run aground, causing all kinds of damage," he said.



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