

# New anti-palm

# oil campaign

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Several oil-producing countries in the West have embarked on a campaign claiming that oil palm plantations pose environmental problems following efforts by Malaysia to produce an environment-friendly plastic from palm oil, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

These countries urged end-users to boycott products made from palm oil on the premise that oil palm estates pollute the environment.

He said these countries were afraid that the bio-degradable plastic made from palm oil would be a strong competitor to plastic manufactured from petroleum products.

The Palm Oil Research Institute of Malaysia recently announced it had created an environment-friendly plastic using a new technique to produce polymers from palm oil.

The plastic from palm oil is bio-degradable and will decompose in time.

Dr Mahathir, who was speaking to reporters during his Hari Raya open house, said the campaign by the oil-producing countries was similar to the one initiated by temperate timber producers against Malaysian tropical timber.

"This is an economic ploy because some of these countries resort to such tactics when they find that they cannot compete with our products.

"We know there is no sincerity on the part of Western countries to solve the environmental problems of the world. Many of them prefer to use environment as an excuse when they find it difficult to compete with developing countries."

Asked to comment on the introduction of a Bill by US Senator Al Gore urging the US Government to call on the Malaysian Government to take immediate steps to protect rainforests in Sarawak, Dr Mahathir said:

"Some Western countries feel that they have the right to get involved in the internal affairs of other countries. This attitude would bring problems in the near future.

"They feel that they are the policemen of the world and want to take action if they feel someone has done wrong."

He said the task force to be established by the Government to counter the anti-tropical timber campaign by environmentalist groups would give a true picture of what is happening in Malaysia.

He said that although Malaysia's capacity to counter the smear campaigns might be less than the capacity of the developed countries to embark on them, the Government would, nevertheless, take the necessary action.

On the Earth Summit to be held in June in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia has not decided whether to attend it.

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He ~~added~~ that there was no reason to attend it at the moment.

This, he said, was because there was no sincerity among developed nations which could not guarantee they would abide by the decisions taken at the summit.

He said that during the plenary meeting of developing nations in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia would gauge the views of all the developing countries and discuss steps to ensure that they are not oppressed by developed nations on the issue of environment.

On reports in the foreign media quoting Bruno Manser that Dr Mahathir had written to him about the Penan issue, he said:

"He wrote me a letter stating that if anything happens to the Penans, I will have to take full responsibility for it.

"I replied that if anything happens to the Penans, it is he who has to take the responsibility because he is the one who has been intimidating the Penans.

"The Penans are peaceful people who do not like to quarrel with others but after Manser's teachings they have become very militant and do not respect the law."

Meanwhile, Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said the task force to counter the anti-tropical timber campaign would go into action in July.

He said the task force, funded by the Malaysian Timber Industry Development Board, would start its campaign in Europe where the environmental pressure groups were active.

"We will then follow up with campaigns in the United States, Australia and Japan where these groups are just as active," he said after attending Dr Mahathir's Hari Raya open house.

Dr Lim said the task force's aim was to "win the hearts and minds" of the international community that was being influenced by militant pressure groups.

"The anti-tropical timber campaign is a new trend that is being waged against Malaysia and other developing countries.

"We have to prepare ourselves to take on this new trend of political thoughts that is being introduced in the name of the environment and ecology," he added.