

GREENING THE EARTH

Mahathir wants global fund to maintain forests

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia has proposed a global fund be set up to finance planting of forests.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the fund could also be used to rehabilitate and maintain forests.

Contributions to the fund, he said, should be based on the population, wealth, and the ability to meet greening targets and other relevant factors.

Opening the Second Ministerial Conference of Developing Countries on Environment and Development yesterday, Dr Mahathir said countries which had levels of carbon dioxide that exceeded a defined threshold should pay on the basis of an agreed schedule.

"However, nothing in these proposals must compromise the principle of sovereign right to development," he said at the Crown Princess Hotel where the three-day conference is being held (*Full text in Pages 19 and 20*).

The North, he said, had insisted that the Global Environment Facility (GEF) be the sole mechanism for funding environmental projects within the framework of decisions to be taken at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June:

"If the GEF is to be another appropriate funding mechanism after Rio, there must be a major transformation of the GEF to make it more democratic with universal membership encouraged and access and disbursement provided under agreed criteria," he said.

Dr Mahathir also proposed that the global community target at least 30 per cent of the Earth's terrestrial area to be reforested by the year 2000.

"The world now has 27.6 per cent of its land under forest cover and we need only increase this by 2.4 per cent over the next eight years," he said.

Dr Mahathir also urged all countries to set national greening targets and those which had no suitable land must contribute adequate funds to developing countries with available land.

Taking a swipe at developed countries, he said: "The North, in particular, should not find this difficult because it has the funds, the technology and the resources."

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They could also divert the subsidies for their inefficient farms towards a massive reforestation of these farmlands instead.

"No new funds are therefore needed, and yet the result will be a greener and bigger carbon sink," he said.

Dr Mahathir also called on developing countries to come together to debate on a common stand.

"Let there be no break in our ranks when we talk about the environment. We will share the burden strictly in proportion

within our culpability and our capacity," he said.

"By no means can we accept that we sacrifice our development in order that the rich and the powerful can enjoy ever-improving standards of living. Indeed, it is the rich who must be prepared to sacrifice their progress in the interest of our development," he said.

He also said the South must set an example of international co-operation and evenhandedness as its own contribution to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.