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MALAYSIA UNAFRAID TO SET ITS OWN STANDARDS ON ENVIRONMENT
Mahathir-Environment

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 8, (Bernama) -- Malaysia is unafraid to say that its standards on environment are different from those of the developed nations because it did not mean that the Malaysian standards were inferior to those of the West, ~~Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad~~ said today.

+Our standards are in fact superior to theirs,+ he said during a question-and-answer session with some 100 participants of a national seminar to seek ways to implement the decisions of the Earth Summit.

He was asked whether Malaysia's standards on environmental quality would be of the same standing as those of the developed nations.

+Our standards must conform with our own system, values and culture,+ he replied, pointing out that standards were set by people and it did not mean that they would be inferior to those set by others.

Dr Mahathir cited the example of the free life style of the developed countries that led to the spread of AIDS. +It does not mean that we also have to adopt that kind of lifestyle,+ he said. -- more

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He also cited as example the story of an animal lover who beat to death a man who kicked a dog.

The Prime Minister fielded a horde of questions from the participants at the two-day seminar organised by the National Steering Committee on Environment and Development to discuss and recommend ways to implement the commitments made by Malaysia at the Earth summit three months ago.

Apart from being party to the Rio Declaration and a non-binding blueprint of action to undertake development without harming the environment, called Agenda 21, Malaysia also signed the Convention on Biological Diversity at the summit.

It, however, chose to stay out of the pact on climatic change on grounds that it was a watered down agreement without specific targets to for industrialised nations to reduce greenhouse gases within a specific timeframe.

Dr Mahathir told the seminar that Malaysia was probably the first country, or among a very small group of nations, that had made a national follow-up to the Rio summit, formally known as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). -- more

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He said Malaysia had been seeking to preserve the environment while undertaking development and the costs incurred would bring rewards in the long run.

He cautioned, however, that not all ideas on environment coming from the developed or North countries should be accepted in toto without question.

+You must not be carried away (by these ideas)... that you forget about the people living in the environment,+ he said, underlining the need for a balanced approach when assessing the questions of development and environment.

While conceding that some of the ideas from groups like the +Greenies+ were good, he said in other cases what they were actually saying was that +we should preserve our forests+ while they continue with their lifestyle and produce all the obnoxious gases.

He also said that when Malaysia spoke up at international fora, it was not seeking to be a role model for other developing countries. +We were setting out to care for our own environment,+ he added. -- more

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At the same, the government was aware that +people will focus on us because we are critical, but we can bear the scrutiny+, he added.

While the government would be more selective in making sure that +dirty+ industries were not set up, he noted that the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment had set up standards which were ahead of the West.

Dr Mahathir recounted that many other developing countries had expressed support for Malaysia's stand in international fora but they dared not do it openly for fear of a backlash from the developed nations.

Herein, he said, Malaysia could draw a lesson in that it must be strong before it could criticise others.

On the implementation of the obligations of the Rio summit, he said institutional changes had been made for the purpose but he warned that the country could not go +overboard+ with it. -- more

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He added they would have to study and define what was meant by +sustainable development+. For this, the government would even discuss with the Non-Governmental Organisations to reach an acceptable definition.

He also stressed the need to educate the people about the environment and its issues for there were still many who did not understand or know about it.

+We need environment education even in schools,+ he said.

Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the UN Tan Sri Razali Ismail, who closed the seminar, said it is satisfying for him to go back to New York, knowing that a national consensus was taking shape on how to implement the decisions of the Earth summit.

He was the leader of Malaysia's delegation to the negotiations on UNCED at the officials level. -- Bernama