

PM: Need to

educate people

By G. Danapal

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — There is an urgent need to educate Malaysians on the environment, even at school level, because many people are still ignorant about issues relating to the subject.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said this was vital because environment issues were on-going and could only be understood through a proper learning process.

With the introduction of environmental education in schools, the younger generation would be able to grasp the complexities of the subject at an early age, he added.

The Prime Minister was speaking at the close of a two-day national seminar on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development here.

The seminar, organised by the national steering committee on environment and development, was attended by about 200 academicians and representatives of the Federal and State Governments, private sector, non-governmental organisations and the mass media.

Dr Mahathir said many Malaysians did not understand terms like "sustainable development" and "environment impact assessment studies".

These terms, he added, had now become an integral part of the environment whenever development projects were being considered.

However, due to their ignorance, they would raise objections, thus making it difficult for the authorities, such as the Science, Technology and Environment Ministry, to implement environment protection policies.

Dr Mahathir said educating the people on the environment and making them understand the many issues tied up with the environment and development was no easy matter.

"It is a prolonged process but it will benefit the coun-

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try in the long run as development programmes can be implemented effectively with a population that understands environment issues well."

He said Malaysia should set its own standards on the environment which must be in line with the country's own system, values and culture.

"We don't have to measure our standards by those of developed nations," he said, adding that standards were set by the people but this did not mean that the standards were in any way inferior to those set by others.

"We do care for the environment but in doing so we must not be fanatical about it."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was receptive to ideas that were basically sound because they would eventually have to be accepted by everyone.

However, there were some environmentalists who were extreme in their ideas and held on to the belief that there should be no development as this would affect the environment.

He said that if the ideas of these "environment fanatics" were accepted, people would remain as they were without enjoying the benefits of development and progress.

He said one could not ignore the fact that development was bound to bring changes to the environment.

"But the changes must be such that the quality of life is not compromised."

Dr Mahathir said the time had come for both the Government and the non-governmental organisations to work closely to address environment issues, such as seeking a definition of sustainable development.

He said Malaysia was the first country to follow up on the decision adopted at the

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Dr M: We've become focus of other nations

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Earth summit in Rio.

"This clearly reflects our commitment to the environment," he said, adding that as Malaysia had become vocal in the international platform on environmental issues, the country was now the focus of attention and

scrutiny by others. "But we have the resilience to put up with the critical scrutiny."

He said while many Third World countries supported Malaysia's stand in international forums, they were afraid to openly show it as they did not want to suffer a backlash from developed countries.

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