

PM: M'sians should pay to protect environ

KUALA LUMPUR: Protecting the environment will increase the cost of development but Malaysians should pay for it as it will be a long-term benefit, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

As a developing country, the Prime Minister said, Malaysia faced many limitations in efforts to protect the environment.

"We need development but it sometimes comes in

conflict with the environment.

"Thus we are more exposed to impacts from development as it changes the environment," he said at the plenary session of the National Seminar on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Although preserving the environment would increase the cost of development, he believed it would be easy for Malaysians to pay the cost since

it would be beneficial in the long term.

Mahathir also pointed out that environmental standards set locally might differ from developed countries' but were no less inferior and conformed to local needs and culture.

He chided "environment fanatics" who were too dedicated to the green cause and who chose to retain the old way of life although it retarded development.

While caring for the environment, he said, there should not be extremism but a balance.

"We should not be taken in by ideas from developed countries because when certain environment issues are examined, you will see that they are in their (developed countries') interest and for their welfare, while we are asked to pay the price," he said.

Dr Mahathir told a press conference later

that Malaysia had a right to stop ships with dangerous cargoes from passing through the Straits of Malacca.

"If anything happens, we must pay the price. Although it is an international waterway, we cannot accept people who pollute our water and land," he said.

He reiterated earlier calls that ship owners contribute towards policing of the channel since it was narrow and piracy was rife.