

Forestry follow-up need

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By TAN CHENG LI and
LEE KAR YEAN

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called for the setting up of an inter-governmental task force on forestry to follow up on decisions made at the Earth Summit.

The body could be a constructive way to push for effective implementation of the entire United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Unced) agenda on global forestry.

It should be under the aegis of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the Prime Minister said.

"Apart from the decision taken by the CSD to review forest-related matters in 1995, there has been no significant implementation of the summit decisions on forestry," he said when opening the 14th Commonwealth Forestry Conference yesterday.

He said the task force could undertake the necessary preparations and consultations for the CSD's review on forestry-related matters in 1995.

Dr Mahathir also expressed concern over unfair scrutiny, conditionalities, and threats of label-

ling, bans and boycotts imposed on tropical forests and timber.

"Despite efforts to develop a more balanced and holistic framework for global forestry, general perceptions, attitudes and thinking of developed countries are still fo-

cussed on tropical forests," he said.

He said non-tropical forests and timbers which compete with tropical timber in the same international timber market were not subject to any international standards and commitment to sus-

tainability.

The only set of internationally agreed standards on sustainability was the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA) which applied exclusively to tropical timber.

A proposal by tropical timber producers to expand the ITTA to cover all types of forest has been rejected by consumers in the North.

"This is a glaring case of double standards and a clear contradiction to the decisions of Unced. It requires immediate redress," said Dr Mahathir.

He called on Commonwealth states to lead in implementing Unced decisions since they had promoted a balance approach to global issues of forest and environment through the Langkawi Declaration.

He proposed an initiative be launched to streamline implementation of Unced forest principles within the Com-

monwealth, with emphasis on several areas.

One was the recognition that all states have the sovereign right to exploit and manage their forest resources on a sustainable basis taking into account the social and development needs as well as the protection of the forests and the environment.

Sustainable forest management should apply to all types of forests and timber, and that efforts to green the world should be the main responsibility of countries with low forest cover.

Later at a press conference, Dr Mahathir said the North were not doing enough for the upkeep of the world environment.

"They (the North) have not made any contribution to the environment fund and I don't expect that they will honour the commitment made at World Summit in Rio in the foreseeable future," he said.