

# Reports on Penan: I'm not surprised, says Dr M

JOHOR BARU, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he was not surprised at reports that a non-governmental group in the United States had raised a substantial amount of money by fabricating a story that the Penan of Sarawak were being abused.

"There are such people who like to cash in on problems of their own making," the Prime Minister told reporters after a meeting with Johor Umno members at the Menteri Besar's official residence here.

Bernama quoted Dr Mahathir as saying that there was actually no problem with the Penan but the US group wanted to become their champion by creating problems.

The group had also portrayed itself as a champion solely to get money, he said when asked to comment on claims by an American author that Rainforest Action Network (RAN) executive director Randall Hayes had claimed that the Penan were facing "rape, abuse and cultural genocide".

The author of *Stranger in the Forest*, Eric Hansen, had said that Hayes in a letter to members dated July 28 had alleged, among other things, that streams in the forest were clogged with mud, the Penan had blockaded a logging road, the Penan also risked being beaten by loggers or the police and that the Penan women had been raped before.

The *New Straits Times* today carried Hansen's statement about Hayes.

"I'm not surprised that such a thing has happened. There may have been more people going about soliciting donations because they want to use the money for themselves," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked whether the group should apologise, especially to the Sarawak Government, he said that to him apologies from such people would have no value.

Asked what had prompted the group to act in that way, he said that normally groups like this took upon themselves to monitor the ills of the world.

Hence, they set up bodies like "Asia Watch" ostensibly to find fault with other countries as if they themselves had not erred.

"In fact in their own countries, they commit all kinds of injustices and I suggest that we have a 'Europe Watch', 'America Watch' and 'Australia Watch', he said.

The Prime Minister also questioned their right to criticise Malaysia.

He said what was interesting was that they wanted to be the guardians of the morality of the world when

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they themselves had no morals.

Asked about a news agency report from Jerusalem that Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin will stop over in Malaysia on his return from China, Dr Mahathir said: "We have not received a request that he wants to stop by. I do not think he will."

Meanwhile in Kuching, Sarawak State Secretary Datuk Taha Ariffin welcomed Hansen's efforts in exposing Hayes' statements as mere fabrication.

He was happy that Hansen had the courage to expose Hayes' "story" about the Penan.

"Personally, I am glad that such an expose like this has surfaced.

"For far too long, it has been a one-sided affair.

"I hope this expose by a fellow American will wake up some people who seem to have the biased view and pre-conceived opinion about the State of affairs in Sarawak." Taha said.

Taha also took to task some foreign media publications which printed stories about Sarawak either without checking the facts or deliberately distorting them.

"One should therefore be

careful and realise that what is written in the Western media (on the logging and Penan issue) should not be taken carte blanche," he said.

In another development, Sarawak director of Forest-

ry Datuk Leo Chai said Hayes was lying about the Penan situation.

"If Hayes says that he has seen active logging activities and blockades at Long Iman, then he is lying.

"There are no more block-

ades in the area," he said. Meanwhile, the managing director of Borneo Adventure — the travel company which arranged for Hayes two-week tour of Mulu National Park — Philio Yong, expressed disgust over Hayes account of his travels in the State.

He said in a statement: "I am amazed at how Hayes has turned a regular trip to the Mulu caves into a wild story of deforestation in Sarawak.

"Hayes arrived here as part of our American tour group accompanied by Hansen.

"The group went on a safari, from Limbang to Mulu, along the famous headhunters trail.

"Following Hayes' return to the United States, I was shocked to learn about what Hayes had written in his pamphlet.

"As confirmed by Hansen, Hayes' story is a total fabrication.

"I am very disappointed with his actions."