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Empty green promises

A RECENT article previewing this week's so-called Earth Summit Plus 5 reasoned that the world leaders are meeting again, barely five years after the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, because they were at odds over how to protect forests and the general environment. As far as facts go, the original Earth Summit of 1992 had agreed to a set of agreements on how to go about achieving sustainable development. Everyone made pledges; problem is, very few have seriously attempted to meet them.

So if some leaders of some countries attending the summit sponsored by the United Nations this week are at odds, it is not over how to protect forests and the general environment. Some industrialised countries are clearly not at odds with one another; rather, with themselves and their own corporations that have been opposed to the idea of having to confine their actions to limits set at Rio. Major companies, not too enthusiastic about what was covered in Rio, have not made it a secret that they want amendments, so Washington is still debating its stand on the green issue. Five years after the Earth Summit, some developed countries are still unable to muster the political will needed to influence the private sector. The private sector's unequivocal participation is a critical element in making the Rio agreements work.

This is probably why nobody is giving much weight to the Earth Summit Plus 5, except those countries that know they can use this platform to backtrack or demand more concessions with regards to the agreements reached in 1992. These countries would then start firing at the developing and the less-developed world for trying to develop their economies by digging their own soil and cutting down their own trees. Yet again, the same repertoire of complaints will be heard - that the developing countries are not sensitive enough to the need to preserve nature - when in fact, the developed were the ones responsible for the depletion of the ozone layer. Of course, there will be the inevitable exchange of harsh words and the end of the summit will still see fingers being pointed at the developing nations.

That is why Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is not attending this summit. He has described the Rio summit as a failure because the developed countries did not fulfil their promises of providing funds towards efforts to "green" the earth. In fact, they were more keen on talking about their rights to impose sanctions and regulations on those who fail to play by their rules. In addressing the core issues of the summit, such as the Biodiversity Treaty, The Climate Change Treaty and matters relating to population, poverty and fresh water, their minds are dominated by their greedy desire to put the rest of the world under their political and economic detente.

At the 1992 conference, industrial nations pledged to work toward boosting their foreign aid to 0.7 per cent of their GDP. Instead, the proportion has slipped from an average of 0.35 in 1992 to under 0.3 per cent at present. This has brought into question the purpose of having such summits if the developed countries are quite determined not to accept the views of others. Dr Mahathir is not alone in expressing disappointment over the summit. Leaders of China, India, Mexico and other developing nations are snubbing the Earth Summit Plus 5.

Nothing has actually been done to assist the less-developed countries in uplifting their economies. Instead, the capitalist West has concentrated

on interfering in the internal affairs of nations like Albania and Nigeria. Frankly, there is no economic significance in attending such a meeting, unless the US and its allies are ready to start transferring clean technologies to their less-developed partners. What is the point of issuing a global warning, only to observe one third of the world population still living in poverty. There is no use telling others to stop cutting or burning down forests if the developed themselves continue developing military equipment. Before the Earth Summit turns out to be a minor meeting of the developed, it is necessary for all countries to start thinking of ways to improve relationships and mutual development, rather than forming a divisive line of opinion.

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