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Only hot air from rich nations (HL)

Rashid Yusof in London

MALAYSIA will highlight at the Earth Summit which ends in New York today the failure of most developed countries to contribute to the Global Environmental Fund which was agreed on at the 1992 Rio Summit.

Science, Technology, and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said developed countries were required to give to the Fund 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product but only Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Holland had done so.

"Instead, they have tried to transfer the responsibility to the developing countries and the private sector," he said.

Law was speaking before leaving for New York from Budapest where he was in Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's delegation on a working visit to Hungary.

Law said there ought to be a formula which could be implemented to resolve the issue as the matter of sustainable development must be dealt with carefully.

He would also raise at the conference the lack of progress in coming up with legally binding framework on bio-diversity and global warming.

Law said the issue of global warming would be further discussed at a conference in Kyoto in December.

On the call by British Prime Minister Tony Blair at the New York conference for the rich world to lead the way in environmental protection, Law said with the change of Government in Britain and France, there had been greater confidence in making firm decisions.

Meanwhile, at the United Nations, all eyes will be on US President Bill Clinton when he finally appears at the Earth Summit. But at the UN podium, Clinton will be as much in the hot spot as in the spotlight.

Rhetoric has risen all week, from other governments and the environmental movement, demanding leadership from a hesitant Washington in tackling global warming.

Clinton pleased environmentalists on Wednesday by approving tougher US ozone- and soot-emission standards. But few here expect a decisive Clinton announcement on carbon dioxide and other "greenhouse gases" blamed for warming the atmosphere.

"What I expect to see is very little," said Greenpeace USA's Barbara Dudley. "Unless a miracle happens."

Clinton was under fire not just over policy, but also protocol. Some summit participants resent that he did not address them on Monday, the first day of the conference, along with other presidents and premiers.

"It's unfortunate he chose to talk to mayors in California instead of listening to other world leaders here, from the UK, France, Africa," said John Gummer, former British Environment Minister. "It's a very sad loss of leadership."

At the last minute, Clinton even had to postpone his New York speech from yesterday morning to early evening, so he could attend a relative's funeral in Arkansas.

The US chief executive will speak on the eve of the UN summit's adoption of final documents assessing global environmental and development trends.

The conference, dubbed "Earth Summit Plus 5," was convened to review progress since the historic 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

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