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The antics of big nations a bane

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THE annoying thing about the global debate on environment is the tendency of the participants to get rhetorical and to blame one another.

The penchant of certain large nations to dominate and skew the global agenda to their narrow national interests is impeding efforts to tackle the world's environmental issues.

Five years after the United Nations Conference on Development and Environment - dubbed the Earth Summit - in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, little progress has been made.

On the other hand, there has been an increase in the shifting of blame and responsibility among rich and poor nations.

Against this less than encouraging background, Malaysia, as a small country, has to decide whether to approach the issue with a sense of impotence or to continue with its strong and determined stand initiated at the Rio Summit.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister, Datuk Law Hieng Ding, had said that Malaysia would persist with its strong stand although Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, had decided to stay away from the just-ended review meeting in New York.

Speaking to Malaysian journalists in Budapest earlier this week before leaving for the UN meeting, Law said Malaysia would highlight the failure of most developed countries to contribute to the Global Environmental Fund, which was agreed to at the 1992 Rio Summit.

He 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, said Law, they have tried to transfer the responsibility to the developing countries and the private sector.

Speaking at the Summit itself, Law called for collaboration between the developed North and developing South instead of persisting with the bickering and shifting of blame and responsibility.

Perhaps the world could achieve more if nations and governments are willing to reorientate their thinking.

If for almost five decades the world was divided into blocs by ideology, and wars were fought in its name, the post-Cold War era should see the world uniting for a common goal.

And there is no better agenda for global unity than saving this planet from an environmental catastrophe.