

08/08/2000

PM: Push for legal instrument

Patvinder Singh; Lee Shi-lan

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Malaysia is pushing for a legally-binding instrument on all types of forest to address a whole range of issues on forestry and timber in a holistic, integrated and comprehensive manner, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia believed that such a legal instrument would facilitate the achievement of sustainable forest management by providing a legal framework and equal treatment for all forests, compared to the present ad hoc, non-legally binding international environment which could hinder the best forestry practices.

"We also believe that such an instrument would enable international level action to be taken to address underlying factors for forest shrinkage and degradation in transboundary areas, such as international debt and sustainable consumption patterns.

"The instrument would also encourage and accelerate co-operation in the transfer of technology," Dr Mahathir said in his speech at the official opening of the 21st International Union of Forestry Research Organisations (IUFRO) World Congress at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

His speech was read by Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik.

Dr Mahathir said at present, the lack of consensus on the necessity of a legally-binding instrument was due to the impasse concerning critical issues such as finance, transfer of technology and trade.

"In this regard, I would like to urge the developed countries to re-affirm and put into action their commitments to provide concrete financial assistance and technologies to developing countries to achieve sustainable management of their forests."

Dr Mahathir said additionally, sustainable forest management should be promoted through mutually supportive trade and environmental policies, not through boycotts and ban on forest products, particularly tropical forest products, or linking stringent environmental standards to market access.

He said such actions would only render forests valueless and result in forests being cleared for other purposes.

"Trade and environmental restrictions will not reduce deforestation. In fact, greater market access will help promote sustainable forest management by providing the revenue for this purpose."