

# Dr M: Don't tell us how to use forests

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has told rich nations to stop dictating to Malaysia how it should use its forests to earn income.

"While they have destroyed theirs, it is not fair for them to ask us to earn less from our forests.

"Malaysians and local non-governmental organisations should not get carried away with the so-called environmental consciousness of the foreigners until we are forced to sacrifice our forests' economic importance for their comfort," he said when launching the Science, Technology and Environment Ministry's Silver

Jubilee celebrations at Putra World Trade Centre here.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia would not give in to foreign pressure to preserve its forests to serve as their "carbon sink."

"While we need to preserve our forests, we should be able to derive income from our forests equitably.

"The forests are the country's source of income. We are not a rich nation. We need to derive income from the forests, particularly logging, to develop the country's economy and also to provide enough space for its increasing population.

"We also need forest areas for water conservation to

generate electricity and for agriculture purposes," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the country's forests were among the oldest in the world and had great potential for the genome-based industry.

He added that the country should instead extend co-operation to foreign researchers to gather and keep samples and data of plant and animal genomes.

"I am confident that with the abundant genomes found in plants and other living things in the forest, we will be able to develop our own biotechnology industry," he said.

He added that was why the Government had agreed to develop a biotechnology valley within the Multimedia Super Corridor.

He encouraged local scientists to be seriously involved in biotechnology which could contribute towards the country's economic growth.

Later, in Putrajaya, after chairing the national aerospace council meeting, Dr Mahathir said the Government was still reviewing a suitable approach to make the two light rail transit companies — Projek Usahama Aliran Ringan Automatik Sdn Bhd and Sistem Transit Aliran Ringan Sdn

Bhd — more viable.

In denying a foreign newspaper report that quoted government officials as saying that the Government had decided not to compensate operators of the two companies for surrendering their concessions, Dr Mahathir said: "We will pay compensation to the companies as required."

According to the report, under a revised rescue plan, the Government would assume total liabilities of RM5.5bil owed by the two operators but would not compensate them as proposed under a rescue plan announced in December last year.