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## Stop plundering Mother Nature

By AHIRUDIN ATTAN

IT WAS A SAD AND SOBERING SIGHT, the Prime Minister gazing at a badly scarred Bukit Cahaya, a picture the local papers carried on their front pages of March 4.

And the headlines and sub-headings that accompanied the picture tell readers of what was going through the man's mind: "Not a single tree standing, nor a blade of grass ... Khir Toyo told to take swift and severe action" (NST); "Not a pretty sight ... PM slams selfish developers, lists actions he wants taken" (The Sun); and "Prime Concern ... PM orders measures to protect environment" (The Star).

But that picture also brought about powerful *deja vu*, too. Not too long ago, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's predecessor, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, was also photographed looking down from a chopper at the wanton destruction of forests and hills around the city.

Dr Mahathir had also lashed out at parties who betrayed the environment for quick profit.

Between then and now, the merciless rape of Mother Nature has continued almost unabated. Bukit Cahaya is just another hill that has been left to die by so-called developers. Take a drive south, north or east and you'll see hills being carved up for all to see!

Or just look around where you live. I have been witnessing the gradual destruction of the environment where I live. We used to be able to say hello to monkeys that resided in the woods just across the road. They have cut all the trees and built a secondary school where the monkeys used to be. Beyond that school, as far as the eyes can see, the only green we could see lies where the golf course is.

There's a playing field in the area which, like most playing fields, is being threatened by "development". The residents there are not taking the threat lying down and I'm glad for that.

But will they be able to save the field? And how many playing fields have vanished that were not reported in the media?

After the tsunami, we were told to preserve mangrove swamps because this could save us in the event of another tsunami. But did that encourage the Selangor state government to review its decision to locate a landfill on Pulau Carey (which experts say will affect the island's mangrove swamps)?

Why are we treating our environment so badly?

Someone suggested that the problem lies with the fact that those who speak for the environment do not have the necessary clout to speak clearly so as to be heard by those who have the power to listen and act.

But, I argued, the Prime Minister spoke for Mother Nature that day his picture appeared on the front pages of the local papers. What more clout do we need to get things done to save the hills, the trees, the fields, the rivers?

Well, Dr Mahathir had gone on record to admit that even the Cabinet's directives on environment were not followed: either the perpetrators were so bold or the directives were not disseminated well (or at all).

Our laws are too lenient on offenders, someone else said. You steal a pair of socks and boxers at the supermarket and you get fined RM2,000, the same amount a developer would have to pay if he's found guilty for the havoc he wreaks on Mother Nature.

The shoplifter might even get a stroke as a deterrent sentence. The

developer? He can afford to pay the RM2,000 fine daily and still laugh all the way to the bank at the end of the day.

Some said as long as land is a state matter, the abuse will not end. But surely we have placed checks and balances along the way. Or have we?

We have to do more - a whole lot more - to protect the environment. We are all guilty of allowing the unscrupulous to be doing what they have been doing for ages.

Weeks from now almost everyone will forget Bukit Cahaya and Pulau Carey and the picture of Pak Lah gazing out at men's betrayal against nature.

And some other hills, forests, rivers and fields will come under threat from the powerful and greedy.

But if heads start to roll and the rape of Mother Nature is defined as a crime, and the rapists and their accomplices in authority (who abetted them, or have accepted incentives to turn the other way, or who are just plain ignorant) are flogged and sent to jail for their crimes, then perhaps we won't forget so easily.

(END) Source : New Straits Times