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Dr M: Adopt balanced approach in conservation

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PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Malaysia must strike a balance between conserving nature and using its resources for development, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

However, they should also appreciate their natural heritage and preserve it while there was still time to do so, unlike in some developed countries where the environment had been destroyed for industrialisation.

"We still have time to preserve our heritage. We still have our forests, trees and animals. Some of them have disappeared, but most are still there," he said at a fund-raising dinner for the launch of the Malaysian Nature Society's Millennium Fund.

Calling for a balanced view of conservation, he said forests and mountains had resources such as timber, granite and other building materials that were useful to the nation.

He noted the high price of conservation of endangered species, such as the tiger, which had caused the loss of human lives through tiger attacks.

"I realise we must conserve the environment and we must be prepared to make sacrifices to preserve our heritage.

"But I am also the Prime Minister of this country and there are other needs I have to attend to. There are people to feed and to provide shelter for, and sometimes we must sacrifice our heritage."

However, he added, using nature's resources need not be at the expense of the environment.

Dr Mahathir, the patron of the fund, was accompanied by his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali. The fund will be used for MNS' conservation and education projects.

The Prime Minister, who quipped that he would soon be signing up as a member of the society, also made a donation to the fund.

MNS president Datuk Dr Salleh Mohd Nor said several protected areas had been set up because the society had documented the flora and fauna found in those areas.

Among them were the Endau-Rompin National Park in Johor and Pahang, Pantai Aceh National Park in Penang, the Belum forest in Perak and Batu Caves in Selangor.

With the fund, the society will explore more areas to create more protected areas.