

Dr M on greed that fell trees and robs lives

MalaysiaKini.com

Nov 10, 2014

Dr Mahathir Mohamad recounts how when being driven along “one of the magnificent roads in our country”, he witnessed a stream of lorries ferrying logs passing in the opposite direction.

And when he queried his companion, a local, as to who the logs belonged to, the latter responded with a whisper.

"He turned and smiled conspiratorially and whispered the owner's name. I could hardly hear him but it would seem he was afraid of being heard.

"He was clearly scared, although apart from the driver and my ADC (aide-de-camp), there was nobody else in the car," he added.

Mahathir also warned about the perils of deforestation, saying "many more would die and many have died" and noted how corruption and greed have led to forests being cleared in an expeditious manner.

Though Mahathir did not mention the location where this incident took place, his comments come amid the Cameron Highlands mud floods, which killed five.

Since the tragedy, Pahang Menteri Besar Adnan Yaakob has come under fire, with even the Umno-owned daily Utusan Malaysia lambasting him for being incapable of resolving the illegal land clearing that caused repeated floodings in the area.

Numerous reasons

In his latest blog posting today, Mahathir lamented about vast stretches of the nation's forests being cleared “but nobody seems to know for whom the logging is done”.

He said there were numerous reasons for cutting down the trees, with the first being to extract timber, legally and illegally.

Then there is the clearing for development of rubber and palm oil plantations, which he pointed out are huge, totalling millions of hectares over the years.

“Small time farmers clear hillsides to plant ginger and other vegetables. Each farm is small but the total area for ginger is big.

“The mining for iron ore and other minerals has begun again. Huge forest areas are being denuded as open cast mines expand and expand in area.

“Living space also requires forest area to be cleared. As towns expand, the poor sell their suburban kampung and move to forest areas, where legally as well as illegally low-cost houses are erected,” he added.

Stop the corruption

Between all these reasons for clearing the forest, Mahathir noted, it is said that 70 percent of Malaysian forests have been cleared.

“This country is in the rainforest region. Rainfalls are heavy. In the past, rain falls on the thickly leafed trees and the thick undergrowth and much rain does not reach the ground.

“On the ground the trunks and exposed roots cause the water flow in any one direction to be slowed. So much of the water seeps into the ground or dries up.

“Some of the water flows to lower ground and forms tiny streams, which in turn form bigger streams which flow into rivers. The speed of flow is slow, obstructed by roots of trees and shrubs and rocks. Erosion of the ground is limited,” he said.

“As the rain water now falls directly on the bare earth and immediately flows rapidly towards lower ground, the volume grows along the way.

“The rivers become swollen, rising rapidly and flow downstream. The massive amount overflows the banks and floods the surrounding land. The ground softens and landslides occur.

“This is the origin of floods and landslides. No one can deny that the deforestation is causing this,” he added.

To arrest the situation, Mahathir said, illegal land clearing and the corruption that went with this practice must be stopped.

“Then we need to look again at legal clearing. Do we really need to make money from logging?

“Do we need to give out concessions for this? The people who get the concessions are not really poor. They should make more money than they already have some other way,” he said.

