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PM seeks scientists' help on haze

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SOLUTIONS: Call to advise affected countries on how to cope with smog

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak urged local and foreign scientists gathered for a two-day meeting here to look for solutions to the haze plaguing the country for the past 18 years.

As he was about to sit after addressing the 3rd Apec Economies'

Chief Science Advisors and Equivalents meeting yesterday, he stood up, walked to the podium and said: "We have suffered enough from the problem of haze for the past 18 years and I hope science advisers can discuss this."

"Please advise the countries concerned on how to cope with this. Prevent the slash-and-burn technique for clearing land for agriculture."

Najib urged the science advisers to discuss ways to prevent peat fires, whether deliberately or because of climate change. He said he would be interested to know the findings and would raise the matter in the coming Asean Summit and Apec meeting.

Haze is an annual occurrence in Malaysia, with this year's problem

lasting for two months, forcing schools to close after the Air Pollutant Index hit very unhealthy levels of over 200. Several areas were declared hazardous with API readings of 300 or more.

In his address earlier, Najib said science diplomacy between countries was crucial to face the 21st century in terms of climate change, food and water security, energy, poverty alleviation and health.

He told the 100-odd participants that the crux of sustainable development for Malaysia was to support the economy and to alleviate poverty without compromising the ability of future generations to do likewise.

Najib said Malaysia had a proud record in science diplomacy.

He added that at the United Na-

tions General Assembly in the 1980s, for example, Malaysia made a determined call for Antarctica to be declared a "common heritage of mankind" under the jurisdiction of the UN.

Najib said Malaysia was at the forefront of articulating the need for a balance between the environment and development.

Malaysia's green cover is about 70 per cent, with 55.35 per cent of its landmass being forested, which he said was a strong signal to the world that Malaysia "walks the talk" when it comes to environmental conservation and sustainable development.

In Malaysia, the government realised early that the only way for people to break free from the vicious

circle of poverty was through economic progress that went hand in hand with social growth and environmental management, added Najib.

He said all governments required technological and scientific advice, and this was amplified in times of crisis and emergencies.

"It is imperative, therefore, that those in charge of providing advice to governments must be armed with knowledge of the scientific developments in various fields. They must have access to the best minds in science and technology to form collaborations or seek opinions when necessary."

Present was the chief science adviser to the prime minister, Professor Tan Sri Zakri Abdul Hamid.