

TOWERING MERBAU PICKED AS OUR NATIONAL TREE

**With its hardy nature, it can be symbol
of national pride for Malaysians, says PM**

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CAPABLE of reaching up to 50m in height, the merbau, one of the tallest trees in the tropical region, is officially Malaysia's national tree.

Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the merbau could be a symbol of national pride.

"I would like to announce that the merbau (Malacca teak) has been chosen as our national tree.

"With its hardy nature, I believe that it can be a symbol of national pride for Malaysians," he said at the opening of the "Hutan Kita — Journey through our Rainforest" exhibition at the Kuala Lumpur Tower here yesterday.

Water, Land and Natural Resources Minister Dr A. Xavier Jayakumar said the merbau was chosen as it could be found across the peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak.

"The tall, strong and big hardwood tree was selected as a symbol of the integrity of the nation's forests as a result of sustainable management and biodiversity conservation."

He said the tree, also known by its scientific name *Intsia palembanica*, was a symbol of the importance of forests to the economy and industries.

However, it is under increasing threat from loggers.

Dr Mahathir reaffirmed Malaysia's commitment to maintain at least 50 per cent of its land area under forest cover to honour the pledge made during the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in Brazil in 1992.

"At the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992, as the prime minister back then, I made a pledge that Malaysia will maintain at least 50 per cent of our

land mass under forest cover.

"Today, almost three decades later, I am proud to announce that we have not reneged on that pledge."

He said Malaysia's forest cover was at 55.3 per cent, or 18.28 million ha, of its total land area, exceeding the government's initial commitment made during the summit.

This, he said, represented the nation's will and commitment to conserve and sustainably manage forests, as well as flora and fauna.

He said it represented Malaysia's ability to not only keep its word to global partners, but also outdo its expectations.

"Our forest cover is more than that of most large European countries, including France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom."

He said despite the economic growth and rapid urbanisation, maintaining forests and making agricultural land more productive to meet increasing demand could not have been achieved without pragmatic, progressive and sustainable development policies.

The Land Conservation Act 1960, Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and National Forestry Act 1984 were instrumental articles of legislation, which provided the legal framework covering every aspect, including land use, wildlife protection, administration and conservation of forests.

Dr Mahathir, however, said Malaysia had been accused of putting its needs for development before the needs of its forests, drawing on the exploitation of deforestation by palm oil lobbyists.

"The claims linking palm oil to deforestation are baseless, unfair and unjustified.

"They have a negative impact on Malaysia, which depends on

the palm oil industry to boost the people's socioeconomic wellbeing to help us achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

"It has detrimental effects on oil palm growers, including 650,000 smallholders and 1.5 million people employed throughout the palm oil supply chain."