

Dr M defends palm oil in UN address

PM urges European nations not to impose ban just to sustain their own edible oil

NEW YORK: Using the United Nations as his stage, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad made his case against attempts to ban the import of palm oil, describing it as a classic case of blocking free trade.

The Prime Minister said there was nothing to show that palm oil had any adverse health effects.

Alluding to the ban on the import of palm oil as proposed by the European countries, he said: "There is no evidence that it is poisonous. We appeal to the good sense of the rich not to impoverish us, not to deprive hundreds of thousands of our workers from earning a living. You will be doing a good deed by consuming palm oil."

Speaking at the general debate of the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly here, Dr Mahathir reckoned that due to the inability to sustain the competitiveness of their own edible oils, a campaign was mounted to ban palm oil, with claims also being that the habitat of long-nosed monkeys was being

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destroyed and that carbon dioxide absorption was reduced.

Saying that Malaysia was as equally concerned about the environment as the Europeans, the Prime Minister pointed out that the country's forest cover stood at

55.3% now, exceeding the pledge it made at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 to maintain at least 50% of landmass under forest cover.

On trade wars, he said it was wasteful and would stultify the potential for all to become rich.

Taking aim at sanctions being levelled against certain countries, Dr Mahathir said it was not known under which law such sanctions were applied.

"It appears to be the privilege of the rich and the powerful. If we want to have sanctions, let us have a law to govern them.

"The fact is that when a sanction is applied to a country, other countries get sanctioned as well. Malaysia and many others lost a big market when sanctions were applied on Iran," he added.

Dr Mahathir, who was addressing his second UNGA since returning to power last year, said all countries wished to prosper and should be allowed to develop on their own, but this was being hampered.

Despite much talk about free trade, he said fresh regulations were being introduced all the time which were detrimental to the development of poorer nations.

"This is because proposals on rules and regulations are made by the rich, often secretly.

"The poor are practically forced to accept them," he said, citing the example of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

"It was cooked up in Washington with input from their big businesses.

"In the agreement, governments of small countries could be forced to compensate the big foreign companies with huge sums of money, should their decision affect the profitability of the big companies, including future profits," he said.

Fortunately, Dr Mahathir said the powerful country which prepared these agreements had rejected it.

"With the exclusion of this country, the agreement has become more palatable. But the agreement

still laid down conditions for trade - which negates free trade.

"We are told that we must remove duties on imports, or reduce it so that foreign products can knock out our infant industries.

"We are reduced to exporting only raw material. How do we industrialise and create jobs for our people?" he asked.

Dr Mahathir said that although he believed in capitalism, "capitalism has gone mad".

"They are already talking of making trillions. It's dangerous for a person or company to have so much money.

"It can influence things. It can buy power, hence the anti-trust laws. We see this in the TPP when the rich companies had given themselves the power to sue governments.

"The terms of the agreements were drawn up by them. And they are not all like Bill Gates. Most are bent on exploiting the power money gives them," he said. — Bernama