

## Malaysia showcases forest preservation

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PETALING JAYA: More than half of the land area in the country remains covered by forests despite rapid development, and the government is committed to continue preserving our rainforests' rich biodiversity.

Water, Land and Natural Resources Minister Dr A. Xavier Jayakumar says 55.3 per cent of the land area in Malaysia, or 18.28 million hectares, are covered by forests.

This exceeds the 50 per cent pledge made by Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad during the Rio Earth Summit in 1992.

"Our success in combining developmental and environmental needs ensures that we do not destroy our rich fauna and flora, especially in our rainforests, which are one of the oldest in the world," Jayakumar tells the New Straits Times.

He rubbishes foreign campaigns accusing Malaysia of rapid deforestation linked to palm oil plantations.

Describing such campaigns as "misguided", Jayakumar says the palm oil industry has been developed sustainably to prevent the destruction of forests and wildlife habitats.

Among others, the government has imposed restrictions on the planting of oil palm on peatland, as well as permanent forest reserves.

Efforts to enhance yield instead of expanding land have also seen significant results.

Jayakumar says the government will enhance sustainable forest management and mainstreaming biodiversity in Malaysia's socio-economic development agenda, post-2020.

This includes increasing Totally Protected Areas from 13.2 per cent to 20 per cent by 2025 as set out in the National Policy on Biological Diversity.

Another initiative is the five-year 100 million trees planting campaign.



Water, Land and Natural Resources Minister Dr A. Xavier Jayakumar is confident that at least 50 per cent of Malaysia's land area will continue to be covered by forests.

The ministry is also organising the "Hutan Kita — Journey Through Our Rainforest" exhibition to enhance public awareness about the government's efforts in preserving forests.

It is open to the public for a month beginning Aug 24 at the KL Tower.

The exhibition, to be launched by Dr Mahathir tomorrow, will showcase the country's rich biodiversity in the forests, as well as efforts to preserve this natural heritage. Admission is free.

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