

Nov. 21/197

APEC IN VANCOUVER

THE VANCOUVER SUN, FRIDAY

Environmental peril facing Canada has parallels elsewhere, forum told

The destruction of forests and fish stocks in British Columbia is similar to that in Malaysia — both regions face depletion of resources by profit-driven companies, the People's Summit hears.

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VANCOUVER SUN

Environmental threats facing Canada are much like those pressing on many of the 17 other economies represented in the APEC forum, a conference heard Thursday.

Parallels between the destruction of forests and fish stocks in B.C. and Malaysia attracted attention at the conference, called Towards a Sustainable Asia Pacific. It was one of several alternative APEC events at the People's Summit.

Malaysian lawyer Meena Raman said Canada and Malaysia

are both resource-rich countries in danger of having their forests, fish and minerals depleted by the profit motive that drives the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

Logging has claimed old-growth forests and ruined streams in Malaysia, just as they have in B.C., said Raman, of the Consumers Association of Penang.

Fish stocks and habitat are being lost in Malaysia, as they are in B.C., he said.

The trouble with APEC's free-trade agenda, said Raman and others, is that it makes it easier

for corporations to exploit resources because liberalized trade puts pressure on many nations to soften their environmental regulations to compete in a global economy.

Elizabeth May, head of the Sierra Club of Canada, joined Raman in saying APEC and the North American Free Trade Agreement give ultimate power to multinationals, restrict nations' sovereignty and reduce governments' ability to use their resources to first look after their own people and environment.

Jim Jontz, executive director of the Western Ancient Forest Campaign, in the U.S., said environmentalists considered it a victory when U.S. President Bill Clinton failed this month in his effort to fast-track new international trade deals.

environment.

Countries such as China and Thailand, where pollution and traffic gridlock are strangling cities and causing illness, have been learning that they must address environmental issues if they hope to prosper, Harcourt said.

Harcourt is now a director with the University of B.C.'s Sustainable Development Research Institute.

His optimism that APEC economies will start including environmental concerns in their free-trade agenda contrasts sharply with some participants at the People's Summit.

Sunera Thobani, former head of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, urged total rejection of APEC and the "undemocratic" countries within it.