

26 SEP 1997

Haze-companies

31 M'SIAN COMPANIES DONATING TO HAZE FUND

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 26 (Bernama) -- Thirty-one of 43 Malaysian companies with economic interests in Indonesia today pledged to contribute to the government-initiated haze disaster fund.

Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat announced this after a meeting between the National Disaster Management and Relief Committee and representatives of the companies.

Their contribution would, among other things, help finance efforts to put out forest fires in the republic which are the main cause of the current haze affecting several countries in the region, notably, Malaysia.

Mohamed, who is committee chairman, presided over the meeting held at the National Operations Room at the Prime Minister's Department here.

"At the meeting, I circulated to them a personal letter from the (Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also the) National Operations Director," he told a press conference.

As for the quantum pledged by the respective companies, their representatives needed to discuss the matter first with their boards of directors, he said.

"We've asked them to donate as much as possible," Mohamed said.

However, he said, the pledge for contribution should not be misconstrued as an admission of guilt by these companies, which were reportedly involved either directly or indirectly, through their Indonesia joint-venture partners, in open burning of forests to open up plantations there.

Mohamed said the companies, most of them public listed, had no problem contributing to the fund, showing that they cared about the problem.

He said the fund, to be managed by the committee, was aimed at funding research on the long-term effects of the haze on the people's health and supplying fire-fighting equipment to Indonesia.

"It will also provide funding for treatment of Malaysians whom we expect to suffer from chronic ailments as a long-term result of the haze," he said, adding that other companies in Malaysia would also be asked to contribute.

Asked about action against the companies whose names were aired over television last night but who did not attend the meeting, he said the national security Division would try to contact them.

"I want to explain that we called for this meeting not to reprimand or accuse them as claimed by some people...we want to discuss and seek their cooperation to tackle the big fires in Indonesia," he said.

He said the meeting was also to explain to them the government's intention to conduct research on the effects of the worst haze ever on the people and to find ways to overcome the problem.

Mohamed also sought the cooperation of the mass media not to reflect any ill-feelings in their reports or cartoons on the haze so as not to jeopardise the good relations between Malaysia and Indonesia.

He also said that the World Health Organisation (WHO) should have taken the initiative to tackle the haze problem which not only affected Malaysia and Indonesia but could turn into a regional problem.

On steps taken by Malaysia to prevent a recurrence of the haze, which is a perennial problem due to the burning of forests in Indonesia, he said the two countries would sign a memorandum of understanding on the matter soon.

He said the draft memorandum would be submitted to the cabinet at its meeting next week. -- BERNAMA
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