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Mahathir-Forest

ACT NOW TO PUT OUT FOREST FIRES, DR M ORDERS MALAYSIAN COMPANIES

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 18 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants Malaysian companies said to have caused forest fires in Indonesia to go to that country now to find ways to put out the raging fires immediately.

The Prime Minister said they should not merely keep quiet but must take responsibility as they owned the companies.

" They should act now... find ways to douse off the fire either by cloud-seeding, using water or mobilise their workers there," he told reporters after launching the 1997-1999 road safety campaign for motorcyclists at Dataran Merdeka today.

Asked to comment on President Suharto's apology on the haze caused by forest forest fires in Indonesia, Dr Mahathir said the stand was very much appreciated.

" I think he also feel responsible on this and we appreciate very much for that...if there is no cooperation from Indonesia, if Indonesia denies it, it will be difficult.

" But Indonesia admits its problem (forest fires as the cause of haze) there although here also were have problems," he said.

He said if both countries could cooperate in tackling the forest fires, at least the fires could be detected early and action taken promptly.

Dr Mahathir said early action was important because if the fire were to spread over thousands of hectares, it would not be easy to put it out.

Commenting on the Cabinet's decision to adopt several tough measures based on the Air Pollutant Index (API) including closure of schools when the index rose to 400, he said they were merely recommendations and were not final.

" The Cabinet has not decided on any actions," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said there was no significant change in the air quality despite of the heavy rain last night.

On his meeting with Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers yesterday, Dr Mahathir said he sought their cooperation to cut down expenses on overseas trips which sometimes entailed a big delegation which was not necessary.

" Sometimes even local authorities send delegations overseas, thus incurring too much expenses," he said.

He, however, said it did not mean that they should completely stop going abroad but must reduce the number of people.

"For instance, if 10 people are going, it can be reduced to three or four people," he added. -- BERNAMA

MNY/APG TS