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Haze-Mohamed

CABINET ORDERS STRICT MEASURES TO TACKLE HAZE

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 17 (Bernama) -- The Cabinet today decided on several stringent measures to deal with the haze which had enveloped the whole country including instructing the police and army to check on open burning.

Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat said relevant agencies had been asked to enforce the law strictly and impose hefty fines against those carrying out open burning.

The Cabinet also decided to ban all forms of open burning irrespective of whether big or small, he said.

The Fire and Rescue Services Department had been ordered to immediately put out any open burnings spotted, said Mohamed, who is also National Disaster Relief Management Committee chairman, at a news conference in Angkasapuri.

The Cabinet also decided that cloud-seeding be carried out more often covering a wider area and not confined to areas where the haze was serious.

It was also decided that the Royal Malaysia Air Force (RMAF) be directly involved in cloud-seeding, he said.

The Cabinet also decided that the Treasury approved funds for the RMAF to buy cloud-seeding equipment to be fitted to the aircraft used for the purpose.

Mohamed said it was important that the stern action against open burning and cloud-seeding be carried out due to the favourable wind conditions which is expected to remain until next month.

He said the improvement in the air quality this morning could be due to the cloud-seeding carried out by the Department of Environment (DOE).

He hoped that cloud-seeding by the Indonesian authorities would help improve the air quality further.

Mohamed also agreed that Malaysia signed a memorandum of understanding with Indonesia to handle the haze problem.

He hoped the Attorney-General's chambers could speed up its scrutiny of the draft so that it could be tabled to the Cabinet soon.

Mohamed said he tabled the National Disaster Relief Management Committee's action plans to the Cabinet today and were accepted.

" We have drawn up certain action plans when the Air Pollutant Index reaches 250 and when it goes up to 300, the committee will take over the task from the DOE," he said.

He said schools would be closed when the index touched 400 while a state of emergency would be declared by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when the level deteriorates to 500.

Nevertheless, the task force set up by the committee was drawing up the measures ought to be taken by the government if a state of emergency was declared.

Mohamed said the Cabinet agreed that if the Air Pollutant Index touched 250 and above, all land clearing and earthworks be stopped while factories emitting excessive smoke would be asked to reduce it.

On plans to restrict movements of private vehicles, he said local authorities would be asked to close down parking bays and use of private cars would be limited.

This could be done through car-pooling or allowing cars with even numbers to enter a certain area while those with odd numbers would be allowed on certain days, he said.

He said police would conduct a study to determine the best way to

reduce the movements of private vehicles.

On closure of schools, Mohamed said the Cabinet decided that it was not necessary at the moment.

He said schools would only be closed when the index touched 400.

" When the index reaches 250, all schools should stop their extra curricular activities and students must stay indoors," he added. -- BERNAMA

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