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Discuss forest fires, haze at other forums, UK urged

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EDINBURGH, Fri: Malaysia has asked the UK not to bring up issues on the forest fires and haze affecting South-East Asia during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) but instead discuss them in other forums that involve Indonesia.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said it is best that such problems are discussed in other forums that involve Indonesia, where the source of the forest fires is.

"We will not be able to discuss the issue proper or get effective results if the forum does not involve Indonesia," he told Malaysian journalists covering the four-day CHOGM here on Wednesday night.

Indonesia is not a member of the Commonwealth.

Identifying the haze as one of the subjects to be brought up in CHOGM which starts today, Abdullah said the UK can bring up the forest fire and haze issues in other dialogues, especially those involving countries in the Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean).

"In fact, the UK is involved in the Asean-UK dialogue and they will also host the Asia-Europe Meeting. That is what we are proposing," he said, in response to the proposal specifically brought up by British Prime Minister Tony Blair on actions to be taken to tackle the haze problem in South-East Asia.

Abdullah said the UK has proposed a Commonwealth environment project to tackle the forest fires and haze affecting the South-East Asian countries.

Noting that this will be the first time CHOGM will focus on economic issues, Abdullah said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will bring up issues on currency manipulation in the meeting today.

Dr Mahathir will be the first Commonwealth head of government to deliver a speech at the first executive session of the meeting.

Abdullah said that as much as the country hopes for full support of the Prime Minister's message on the currency speculation problem, this will depend on the discussions among the Commonwealth leaders on what is presented by Malaysia at the meeting.

On issues involving Nigeria, Abdullah said Malaysia's special envoy to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group), will present the recommendations of the group, including the possibility of imposing sanctions, to the heads of government.

"The recommendations will be discussed at CHOGM. Let the leaders decide on the recommendations," he said.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir will hold bilateral meetings with several Commonwealth leaders, and at least six have requested to meet Dr Mahathir.

Of the six, four prime ministers are expected to meet Dr Mahathir today. They are Mr James Bolger of New Zealand, Mr John Howard of Australia, Mr Goh Chok Tong of Singapore and Sheikh Hasina Wajed of Bangladesh.

The other two leaders are Cyprus President Glafkos Clerides and Malta Prime Minister Dr Alfred Scart.

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