

15 SEP 1997

Mahathir-Haze

EMERGENCY ONLY IF HAZE AT CRITICAL LEVEL, SAYS PM

SEPANG, Sept 15 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the government will declare a state of environmental emergency only if the haze pollution hanging over the country reaches a critical level.

The Prime Minister said at the moment, there was no need to do so.

The entire country is now enveloped by what has been described as its worst haze ever, a phenomenon largely attributed to forest fires in Indonesia's Sumatra and Kalimantan regions.

"Not yet...if the haze is critical, we will declare (emergency)," he told reporters after visiting the soon-to-be completed Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) here.

Dr Mahathir also said the cloud-seeding operation to induce rain would be carried out throughout the country.

Currently, cloud-seeding is only done in some parts of the Klang Valley covering Kuala Lumpur and Selangor.

The Prime Minister said those involved in cloud-seeding work were told "to seek the cloud where ever the cloud is found".

"The haze is now 9,000 feet. Even the clouds have been hidden by the haze...seeking clouds but they could not be found.

"So now when any cloud is found anywhere, they will do (cloud-seeding). Not necessarily over Kuala Lumpur (Klang Valley)," Dr Mahathir said.

As the Prime Minister spoke, the air quality throughout the country further deteriorated with the air pollutant index (API) showing the Gombak area in Selangor almost reaching "hazardous" level with a reading of 298, the highest in the country.

The Department of Environment, in a statement today, said that up to 11am, six other areas -- Nilai, Kuala Lumpur, Kajang, Klang, Petaling Jaya and Melaka -- have reached a "very unhealthy" level, with readings of between 200 and 300.

Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today that the ministry had not decided whether to temporarily close all schools throughout the country despite the worsening haze.

Dr Mahathir was also asked if there is a need to take stern measures to reduce the haze pollution.

"Stern measures have been taken but the haze is still," he said.

On the KLIA, Dr Mahathir said he was briefed on the progress of the RM9 billion airport project.

He said the airport would be ready to start commercial operations during the first quarter of next year.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir and Cabinet ministers witnessed the test landing of a Malaysia Airlines (MAS) Boeing 747 aircraft at Runway One of the airport.

Among the ministers present were Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik (Transport) and Datuk Seri S.Samy Vellu (Works). -- BERNAMA

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