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Evacuation being considered

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - It may be difficult to carry out, but the Government is giving some thought to evacuating people affected by the haze in Kuching if the situation worsens.

National Disaster Management and Relief Committee chairman Datuk Mohamed Rahmat said the Sarawak committee on the haze had been directed to submit a report on the latest effects of the haze in the Sarawak capital before further action was taken.

"This may be one of the measures we will have to consider but we want to take other preventive measures first," he said. The Air Pollutant Index in Kuching went above the 800 level this morning and touched 839 at 11am.

Mohamed, who is also Information Minister, was speaking to reporters after 5,000 masks were distributed to pupils of Bukit Bintang Girls School today. The masks were donated by MetroVision.

Later, at a separate function, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was also asked for details about possible evacuation, said it was something that was very difficult to decide upon.

Dr Mahathir said: "I might say that the index has gone beyond 700 which is very dangerous. But we have to find a place which is free from haze, which is not so easy to find.

"If we can, we will evacuate. If not, we will have to ask the people to wear masks, not to participate in outdoor activities and reduce the use of motor vehicles," he said, adding that evacuation would be carried out as a last resort.

He said this to reporters after witnessing the signing of a collaborative agreement between Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional and Automobiles Citroen, France, with the involvement of Usahasama Proton-DRB in the manufacture, assembly, and distribution of a new Proton based on an existing Citroen model.

The Prime Minister said as the whole of Sarawak had been blanketed by thick haze, the best measure to be undertaken now was to try and help put out the fires in Indonesia.

"That is the ultimate solution. We have to hurry up to put out the fires and our people are already there. The fires cannot be put out completely but at least they can be reduced."

Mohamed said another measure to reduce the haze being considered was to spray water from tall buildings.

"The Fire Services and Rescue Department is looking into this aspect. The Klang Valley has many tall buildings with fire-fighting facilities. Water could be sprinkled from the top to reduce the pollutants," he said.

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