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Evacuation only as a last resort, says PM

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday said the Government will opt for evacuation as the last resort to assist the people of Sarawak, a state that has been placed under haze emergency.

He told reporters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday that it will be difficult to evacuate some one million people in Sarawak because a place to house them is not easily found.

"If we can we will we do it. If not, we have to encourage them to wear masks and reduce outdoor activities," he told reporters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday after witnessing an agreement-signing ceremony between Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton) and France's Automobiles Citroen to manufacture, assemble and distribute a new Proton based on the Citroen Saxo model.

Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, who is chairman of the National Disaster Management and Relief Committee, said earlier yesterday that mass evcuation may be necessary if the haze situation worsened.

"What we want to do now is to try to put out the fire. That is the ultimate solution. Our people is already there (Sumatra) helping to fight the haze problem. We cannot put out the fire completely, but if we can reduce it it will help the situation," he added.

Meanwhile, the French ambassador to Malaysia Mr Edouard Braine, who was present at the ceremony, said he conveyed to Dr Mahathir the recommendations of the French Government on how to tackle the haze problem.

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