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Mahathir-Assistance

HELP TO BE SOUGHT FROM OTHER COUNTRIES TO DEAL WITH HAZE PROBLEM

KUALA LUMPUR, 19 Sept (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today help will be sought from several countries to tackle the haze problem which has been plaguing Malaysia, Indonesia and neighbouring nations over the past few months.

The haze in Sarawak took a turn for the worse this morning, forcing the declaration of a state of emergency.

The Prime Minister, who wrote a letter to President Suharto this week, said Indonesia had agreed for Malaysia to help put out forest fires in Sumatera and Kalimantan which had been causing the haze.

While efforts were being made by the two countries to handle the problem, some other countries would also be asked to assist, he said.

"We will be asking some other countries to help out. We are going to make a request (but) I can't reveal which countries yet," he told reporters after delivering a keynote address on "Malaysia in the Next Millenium: Challenges for The New Generation", at a Universiti Malaya Alumni gathering here.

Forest fires have been raging in Sumatera and Kalimantan over the past few months, spewing smoke which, brought by the wind, has been blanketing most of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei.

Dr Mahathir said he believed that France might have already sent personnel and equipment to help deal with the haze.

He said the French would probably be providing equipment needed for cloud seeding operations such as water bombers and cloud seeding planes and also equipment like hand pumps and foam to put out the fires.

The Prime Minister said the Royal Malaysian Air Force, which had been asked to participate in the cloud seeding operations in Malaysia, would also be helping Indonesia with the operation if the country requested to do so.

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On the situation in Sarawak, Dr Mahathir said more cloud-seeding was needed to clear the air.

"I have asked whether they can do more cloud-seeding, and if they can't

do cloud-seeding, just spray water. Just fly over the densely populated area and spray water probably at certain heights," he said.

The Prime Minister said similar action would be taken in peninsular Malaysia.

"We are continuing with the cloud-seeding irrespective of whether you can find the cloud. We just want to have more rain," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that the present fine imposed for open burning in the country was not sufficient to prevent the act.

Dr Mahathir advised the public to wear masks to protect them from the haze.

"That's why I wore a mask yesterday as an example," said the Prime Minister who wore the mask when launching a motorcycle safety campaign.

Asked if the government would carry out evacuations in places badly affected by the haze like Sarawak, he said: "To where? You can't go to Indonesia, you can't go to Sabah which is just as bad."

In the present situation, he said the public would have to stay indoors and use air conditioners for cleaner air, and wear masks when going outdoors. -- BERNAMA

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