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Mohamed-Haze

INDONESIA-MALAYSIA COOPERATION AGAINST HAZE

JAKARTA, Aug 21 (Bernama) -- Indonesia and Malaysia today agreed to intensify cooperation in fighting the haze problem, Malaysian Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat said today.

"Malaysia is ready to cooperate in helping Indonesia by any means to overcome the haze problem," he said after meeting Indonesian Coordinating Minister on Social Welfare, Azwar Anas and Environment Minister Sarwono Kusumaatmadja, here.

Malaysia had the will to provide either money, equipment or facilities to fight the threatening haze problem in Indonesia and the two governments had agreed to help each other, he said.

He said Malaysia could not blame Indonesia only for the haze problem because such a case could also happen in Malaysia.

"What the two countries need to do is to intensify control against this matter through bilateral cooperation. If Indonesia, for example, needs airplanes or cloud seeding to produce artificial rains to extinguish a forest fire, Malaysia will be prepared to help," he added.

Mohamed said he had been assigned by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to meet Anas and other officials to discuss the cooperation thoroughly.

He said the two sides had agreed to set up a joint committee to be in charge of preparing programmes on fighting the haze problem.

He said he and Anas agreed that the haze had developed into a serious problem for their respective countries and needed to be overcome before it worsened.

Many people in Malaysia had suffered from breathing problems and other illnesses caused by the haze, requiring hospitalisation, he added.

Anas said the haze could be caused either by human negligence or nature, particularly during the dry season in coal deposit forest areas.

He said the government had issued a law providing for a long jail term and a 100 million Rupiah for people found guilty of causing the haze.

He said experience had taught the government that the haze problem in Indonesia occurred in three-year cycles. -- BERNAMA

HS JK