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Indonesian help vital fo fight the haze, says PM

MALAYSIA and Indonesia must activate the existing mechanism on trans-border pollution control co-operation to combat the present haze which has engulfed most of the peninsula.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday that while the mechanism to tackle the problem was already in place, there was a need to activate it.

The northern States of Kedah, Penang and Perlis were badly affected by haze for the past one week.

On Sunday, the Department of Civil Aviation recorded a forward visibility of less than one kilometre, which is far below the 1.9 nautical mile minimum safety limit for aircraft.

"I think what happened is when there was haze this year, we did not make the move to contact Indonesia to find out what could be done.

"It is not Indonesia's fault because we never informed them that we need to work (together) on this particular case," Dr Mahathir said.

He was responding to questions from newsmen on whether there was a need for greater co-operation among Asean countries to fight trans-border air pollution.

Dr Mahathir had earlier opened the Langkawi Oshkosh East Fly In convention and exhibition near the Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre in Padang Matsirat. The event is organised by Le Proton Lima Sdn Bhd.

The haze had on Sunday threatened to affect the opening of the exhibition, as some 20 aircraft were due to fly in from Alor Star.

Asked what action could be taken, Dr Mahathir said the Government may have to find or lease water bombers for example, to help put out the forest fires in Sumatra and Kalimantan which are said to be the major contributors to the haze.

On whether any foreign country had offered to help, Dr Mahathir said: "We cannot wait for people to come forward. We have to ask (for help)."

On a report by foreign media that the proposed second international airport on reclaimed land in Kedah could not be implemented because of the difficulty in funding the project, Dr Mahathir said the international community always doubted Malaysia's ability to implement mega projects.

"There were a lot of projects that the international community said we cannot do, but we did. We will see whether such projects will be implemented or not.

"If we follow what they say, we will still be tapping rubber," he said.

Earlier reports said the Government had agreed to carry out a feasibility study on the project as soon as possible. The Economic Planning Unit is undertaking the study, while the Department of Environment will conduct the environmental impact assessment.

The latter has also appointed the National Hydraulic Research Institute of Malaysia to carry out the EIA on the proposed airport project located off the Kuala Muda coast.

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