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Haze-rocket

MAHATHIR PROPOSES CLOUD-SEEDING USING ROCKET

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 3 (Bernama) -- The Cabinet today discussed a proposal by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that rockets be used for cloud-seeding to alleviate the current haze problem.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said he would discuss the proposal with agencies under the ministry to determine the rocket's specifications and functions

"It may be a small-sized rocket with a one tonne payload or perhaps smaller than firework-launchers," he told reporters after the weekly cabinet meeting here.

According to Law, the prime minister told the meeting that the idea was practicable based on existing rocket technology applied in Japan, India and Russia.

Normally cloud-seeding is carried out by an aircraft.

Law said: "If we succeed, Malaysia will be the first country in the world to use rocket for cloud-seeding."

He said the prime minister also directed the ministry to make greater use of space imaging to detect haze-causing spots especially forest fires.

"We'll have full satellite space-imaging capacity when our Ground Receiver Station is ready in a year," Law said.

The proposed station, estimated to cost RM70 million, will be built in Temerloh.

Three companies from Canada, the United States and France have submitted tenders for its construction.

"All this while we have been spending RM4 million a year to get our satellite images from Bangkok," Law said.

These pictures enable examination of the country's topography and detection of illegal logging and burning of forests, among other activities.

Law also confirmed that a private firm would conduct week-long cloud-seeding starting Monday over the Pedu and Muda areas in Kedah.

The operation, estimated to cost RM50,000, would most probably use Sodium Chloride and water.

Law hinted a similar technique would be applied to create artificial rain to reduce the haze over Kuching and other Sarawak towns as well as those in Sabah.

On today's air quality, Law said the situation in Kuching reverted to the unhealthy level with the Air Pollutant Index touching 104 compared to 53 yesterday.

Visibility in Kuching was down to 0.7 km while in Sri Aman, it was 0.6km and Sibu 3km.

Meanwhile, yesterday's satellite pictures showed more "hot spots" referring to burning forests in west and south Kalimantan.

But they could not ascertain the situation in Sumatera because of thick clouds. -- BERNAMA

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