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Haze-Mahathir

MAHATHIR WANTS FACTORIES EMITTING SMOKE TO SUSPEND OPERATIONS

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 21 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants factories which emit smoke to suspend operations to help the government overcome the haze problem in the country.

The Prime Minister also wanted all earthworks to be minimised and those involved in such work to wet the surroundings so that dust did not fill the air.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters on arrival at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International Airport from Tawau, Sabah, where he opened the Sabah Progressive Party Congress.

He flew into Tawau this morning from Hong Kong where he addressed the annual World Bank and IMF seminar.

The Prime Minister said various measures had been taken to overcome the haze problem and at present eight aircraft were involved in the cloud-seeding operations.

Asked about the reduced Air Pollutant Index readings being given by the Department of Environment (DOE) when people could still see thick haze around, the Prime Minister said the readings were done scientifically "If we just follow our vision..there will be problem."

He also said the government was studying the haze situation in Sarawak "We are studying the situation,..what if we lift the emergency and then the haze returns?"

Dr Mahathir said haze was unpredictable, one moment there and the next moment gone.

"Take today for example, prior to my arrival in Tawau the haze was bad that several (MAS) aircraft could not land but by the time I arrived the situation had improved for the better with aircraft able to land."

On assistance from foreign countries to help overcome the haze problem, the prime minister said that so far only France had responded to Malaysia's request for help by sending a team.

He said the National Disaster Relief and Management Committee's meeting tomorrow would review all efforts taken to overcome the haze as well as new measures to be taken.

Dr Mahathir regretted that Malaysian companies which were also responsible for forest fires in Indonesia had not come forward to help the authorities.

He said 18 companies were identified but so far only Tabung Haji had come forward to help. "The others, it seems, have not come forward. They know about it as we have announced it in the newspapers and, it seems, they are not that responsive to our call to help even though they are involved.

"Now, we'll wait and see what they are going to do," he said of the Malaysian companies involved in open burning to clear land for plantation projects.

Asked whether the government would make public the companies concerned if they still refused to come forward, Dr Mahathir said, "The names of their Indonesian joint venture partners have been published in the newspapers and we have made the search and we know who they are. We have more than 40 companies with joint ventures in Indonesia but only 18 are involved in open burning."

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hing Ding who was at the airport presented a report on the latest haze situation to Dr Mahathir.

Law told reporters that apart from France, Malaysia had also sought assistance from Japan, the United States and several European countries. "We have written to the respective embassies here."

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