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PM tells Malaysian investors to help put out Indon fires

Kamarul Yunus

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants Malaysian plantation companies said to be responsible for some of the forest fires in Indonesia to take immediate action to help put out the fire.

The Prime Minister said the companies involved have the responsibility to do so because the plantations in the republic are theirs.

"I hope the Malaysian companies said to be responsible for the fire in Indonesia will take action now to go there and seek ways to contain the fire.

"They cannot just sit tight and do nothing while the Indonesians tackle the problem," he told reporters after launching a three-year road safety campaign for motorcyclists in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Deng said on Wednesday the Government will investigate two Malaysian plantation investors said to be responsible for some of the forest fires in Riau. One of the two companies was said to be PT Multigambut Industri.

On the apology offered by Indonesia President Suharto to the neighbouring countries, including Malaysia, for the haze problem, Dr Mahathir said Suharto must have felt very responsible for the forest fires and Malaysia appreciates his stand.

"If there is a denial from Indonesia, of course it will be difficult to tackle the haze problem. But Indonesia has admitted that the problem was caused by its country, while we also admit there are problems surfacing in our country.

"Thus, if we can work together, I am confident that we could detect where the forest fires occur and take immediate action.

"It would not be easy to put out a forest fire when it spreads thousands of acres," Dr Mahathir said, adding the letter he sent to Suharto was to seek close cooperation between Malaysia and Indonesia to tackle the haze problem.

Asked whether Suharto had replied to his letter, Dr Mahathir said it was too early for the former to reply.

At the launch of the campaign, Dr Mahathir wore a respiratory mask similar to those commonly used now by motorcyclists and traffic police. He urged all motorcyclists to put on these masks to protect their health.

"I am wearing this mask because of the haze ... to protect my health, not to hide behind it. I hope Malaysians would wear masks to protect their health," he added.

On the confusion over the Cabinet-approved action plan - such as issuing a temporary stop-work order when the Air Pollutant Index (API) reaches the 250 level, while schools will only be closed when the API hits 400 - Dr Mahathir said the measures are not final, merely recommendations to the Cabinet.

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