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PM: Public should play its part too

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the public must play its part if the haze problem were to be overcome.

Dr Mahathir also suggested several measures that could be taken by the public.

He said besides wearing masks, members of the public should minimise the use of private vehicles, especially those with two-stroke engines, and avoid unnecessary trips to reduce smoke emission.

They should instead car-pool or use public transport, he added.

He said it was not practical to make it mandatory for the public to use public transport.

He added that enforcement would be a major problem as motorists would claim that they were using their vehicles for important matters.

"This requires a civic sense.

"If we have to have laws for everything and carry out enforcement, half the population of Malaysia will have to become policemen.

"We have to be self-policing. It is not practical to stop every car to find out whether the motorist is on an important errand or not," he told a Press conference after chairing the Disaster Management and Relief Committee meeting at the Prime Minister's Department.

Asked to comment on the public's perception that the Government was not doing enough to solve the haze problem, Dr Mahathir said: "I would like to ask the members of the public whether they are doing their part.

"They are not contributing. For instance when we say people should stop using cars, they say there must be proper law and enforcement.

"The public has a responsibility also. The Government's capacity is limited.

"Unless the people want to pay higher taxes to enable us to keep a huge enforcement team to tell the people what they can and cannot do.

"Then we will become a totalitarian state where the Government manages everything.

"We do not want that. People should volunteer, they should understand."

The Government, he said, was doing more than what people might think.

He said the ideas to fight the haze came from the Government and not from the public.

On the meeting, Dr Mahathir said the committee reviewed measures to minimise the ill-effects of haze.

He said the state of emergency in Sarawak was still in force because of the very high level of air pollution there.

Dr Mahathir also said Malaysia had sought assistance from Japan and France in fighting the haze.

He said French researchers who were sent here to study the haze situation returned yesterday.

They will recommend to their Government the form of assistance that could be extended to Malaysia.

Asked what type of assistance could France provide, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had requested for water bombers.

He added that assistance had also been sought from Japan which offered "jet-shooters" for the fire-fighting operation.

"We realise the problem cannot be overcome easily but we will try our best," he said, showing a meteorological satellite picture to reporters

which identified hotspots in Kalimantan and Sumatra.

Dr Mahathir also said the committee agreed that kindergartens would be closed when the Air Pollutant Index reading reached 300.

"We will try our best to overcome the haze problem and we hope the media will help the Government by disseminating information on the necessary measures the public should adopt."

Asked how long Malaysians had to put up with the haze, Dr Mahathir said: "We have no experience about this.

"This is perhaps why many people take it lightly.

"In the past, the haze used to clear up whenever it rained.

"But this time it is said that the haze can go on till May.

"But we will do everything possible to overcome it."

Asked to comment on the reluctance of public transport companies to reduce charges, Dr Mahathir said in an emergency everybody had to bear the cost.

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