

22/09/1997

PM: Firms' attitude disappointing (HL)

Tony Emmanuel

PETALING JAYA, Sun. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he was disappointed with the attitude of Malaysian firms believed to be partly responsible for the open burning in Indonesian forest areas which caused the haze.

He said only one of them appeared to be concerned about overcoming the problem.

"With the exception of Tabung Haji, the others don't seem too concerned about coming forward to render assistance.

"We know which are the companies concerned ... the media has published the names of their Indonesian joint-venture companies."

The Prime Minister was speaking to reporters at Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International Airport in Subang tonight, after arriving from Tawau, Sabah, where he officiated at the Sabah Progressive Party Congress.

Earlier, even his flight to Tawau had appeared uncertain because the airport was closed due to poor visibility.

Many were concerned that the Prime Minister's aircraft from Hong Kong would not be able to land.

However, visibility improved and the Prime Minister's jet landed safely at noon. All commercial flights to Tawau resumed in the afternoon.

Dr Mahathir said: "I'm extremely disappointed with their attitude as they should have initiated the necessary measures at the onset."

Dr Mahathir, who is also National Operations Director, said the companies concerned should have come forward considering the names of their joint-venture companies were made public.

"There are more than 40 Malaysian firms which have joint-venture agreements with Indonesian companies but it seems only 18 of them practise open burning to clear land for cultivation."

The Prime Minister said he would chair the National Security Council's haze task force meeting tomorrow, during which necessary steps would be discussed.

Yesterday, National Disaster Relief Management committee chairman Datuk Mohamed Rahmat said Malaysian companies whose Indonesian joint-venture partners were identified as responsible for open burning would be held accountable and should bear the costs incurred in fighting fires there.

Mohamed, who is also Information Minister, said the order was issued by the Prime Minister to the NSC prior to his departure to Hong Kong.

On Thursday, the Indonesian Environment Ministry identified the 18 companies.

They are PT Pinang Wai Mas, PT Padang Bolat, PT Tri Mitra Perkasa, PT Stelindo Perkasa, PT Rabin Mas, PT Gunung Maras Lestari, PT Laidong West Indonesia, PT Sadin Tradewin Indonesia, PT Bumi Permai Surya and PT Tradisi (all in south Sumatra), PT Pulau Rupert, PT Setdco Rupert Tani, PT Agrita Sari, PT Multi Gambut Industri, PT Bina Fitri Jaya, PT Adei Plantation, PT Langgam Inti Hibrido (all in Riau) and PT Tidar Kerinci Agung (Sumatra).

Following the disclosure, Tradewinds (M) Bhd owned up to open burning in Indonesia to clear land for cultivation.

The company, a Pernas International Holdings Bhd subsidiary, also stated that it had stopped the activity about three weeks ago.

Its Indonesian joint-venture company was identified as PT Bumi Permai Surya Lestari in south Sumatra.

On the state of emergency declared in Sarawak, Dr Mahathir said any decision to lift it would depend on changes to the situation.

"Although there has been a decline in the Air Pollutant Index readings, we are still monitoring the situation as the haze is unpredictable."

On the public's perception that the API readings were not accurate, Dr Mahathir said: "What may seem hazy, may not necessarily be so from a scientific view.

"The API figures made public are based on scientific measurements ... we shouldn't rely on impressions."

However, the Prime Minister said the Government was not worried about the API readings.

"What is important is that the necessary measures to tackle the problem (the haze) are implemented.

"At present, there are eight Royal Malaysian Air Force aircraft conducting cloud-seeding operations and slight rainfall was recorded today."

Dr Mahathir called on factories to ensure that emissions at their plants were reduced to help tackle the haze.

"Besides factories, quarry and construction sites should also ensure that steps to prevent a dusty environment are implemented."

On international assistance, Dr Mahathir said he was informed that the French Government had deployed a team.

"We will review all options available at tomorrow's meeting."

Present to welcome him at the airport were his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali and Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding.

(END)