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Haze-Wrap up

SARAWAK SEEKS OVERSEAS HELP TO TACKLE HAZE

KUCHING, Sept 23 (Bernama) -- Sarawak has sought overseas assistance in tackling the deteriorating haze problem in the state.

Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Dr George Chan said today Sarawak had contacted countries like Australia, South Africa and Thailand to help with the cloud seeding operation because they had better equipment for such purpose.

"For example, Australia has similar experience in inducing artificial rain on its desert," he told reporters after chairing a Sarawak National Security Division meeting at the operations room here.

Dr Chan also dispelled rumours of water rationing following a statement by the Kuching Water Board (KWB) yesterday that its water production had been adversely affected by the ongoing drought and that water supply would be restricted if necessary.

The board had advised consumers to avoid any water wastage such as using running a hose for vehicle-washing, garden-watering and house-cleaning.

In Kuala Lumpur Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the government will evacuate people from Sarawak only as a last resort.

"It is still one of the options but it is something we have to do as a last resort because there's about one million people to evacuate. It's not so easily done," he said.

Dr Mahathir told reporters this after witnessing an agreement signing by Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton), Automobiles Citroen of France and Usahasama Proton-DRB Sdn Bhd to build a new Proton car based on an existing Citroen model.

He said in the event of a mass-evacuation it was also difficult to find a place to relocate the people because the whole of Sarawak and even Sabah were affected by the haze.

"I must say that the level of pollutants in Sarawak has gone up to beyond 700 and that is a very dangerous level. But in order to evacuate, we have to find a place and that is not so easily found.

"So, if we can, we will evacuate, if we cannot, then we will have to ask people to wear masks and things like that and not to participate in outdoor activities and reduce the use of motor vehicles," he said.

In Kota Kinabalu, the Sabah government advised the people to stop all outside activities if the haze condition gets worse.

Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee said the decision was made at the State Disaster Management Committee meeting today.

"The committee which has been placed on a 24-hour alert will take appropriate action when the Air Pollutant Index (API) reaches 250," he told reporters after launching the Sabah.Net and the Sabah Electronic Government here, today.

He said the outdoor activities included the Unity Cup soccer match in conjunction with the birthday celebration of the Yang Dipertua Negeri Tun Sakaran Dandai.

Yong said the committee was also informed that Sabah might be facing worse haze condition following the change in the wind direction.

Yong said all schools in the state would be asked to close if the API reading came up to the 400 hazardous level and an emergency would be declared if the reading was at 500.

The API reading in the state today was around 133, which was at the

unhealthy level.

Yong said, leave for the Fire and Rescue Services Department employees had been frozen and together with the police and armed forces they had been placed on alert.

Several Parent-Teacher Associations in Sarawak have urged the Ministry of Education to re-open classes for students who will be sitting for examinations soon.

All schools in Sarawak have remained closed since Friday after the haze emergency was declared.

They said schools involved must ensure that classrooms which would be used were equipped with appropriate facilities to reduce the health risks of students.

The Sekolah Menengah Kerajaan Batu Kawa's PTA chairman, Haji Bujang Ulis, who is also the chairman of Sekolah Rendah Kerajaan Stapok near here said, apart from the students being supplied with face masks, the rooms used must also equipped with fans or air-conditioning units. -- BERNAMA

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