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## British expertise to help country cope with environmental disasters

Joseph Bingkasan in London

THE British Government is sending six Fire Warrior fire-engines and a team of trainers to help Malaysia deal with environmental disasters.

Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said the fire-engines would be deployed to areas most in need, particularly small towns and rural areas where fires could add to the haze problem.

The move is part of an initiative on environmental disaster management for Southeast-Asian countries announced by Cook at a Press conference on Thursday.

Also present were Malaysian High Commissioner Datuk Amir Jaafar and head of the European Commission office in London Geoffrey Martin.

Cook had earlier officially handed over two of the fire-engines to Amir in a ceremony witnessed by Stratchclyde Fire Brigade's Firemaster John Jameson.

The team going to Malaysia, continuing Stratchclyde's 30 years of association with Malaysia's Fire Services and Rescue Department, will also instruct volunteer auxiliary fire-fighters on the use of the fire-engines.

This initiative, already approved in a preparatory meeting, will be endorsed by Asia-Europe Meeting leaders at their summit here next week. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will be heading the Malaysian delegation.

Asked why the fire-engines were sent to Malaysia when the fires that caused the haze last year occurred in Indonesia, Cook said the deployment of the fire-engines and trainers to Malaysia should not be construed as suggesting that last year's haze originated from Malaysia.

"It should be measured in terms of transfer of technology and technical know-how in fire-fighting to avert fires that will cause environmental disasters in the future," he said.

Cook said the initiative, for which STG1 million (RM6 million) had already been earmarked for this year, would be managed by the European Community's Humanitarian Office.

The countries involved in the Echo programme include Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand.

Echo plans to make available substantially more funds for the scheme in the future.

The aim is to train officials, groups and individuals at the local government and community level in disaster management, covering fires, floods, earthquakes, typhoons and pollution from toxic substances.

"Last year's fires in Southeast-Asia brought home to all of us the impact of environmental change on the daily lives of millions.

"This initiative is an excellent response to a growing problem," Cook said.

"It is an example of practical diplomacy and partnership at work and one that will make a real difference to the lives of people in the region. I am pleased to be able to launch this in the run-up to the Asia-Europe Meeting."

On the currency problem in Asian countries, Cook said there would be a separate discussion on the matter at the Asem summit.

He added, however, that whether or not there would be a separate statement on the matter would depend on the outcome of the discussion.

"It will be discussed early in the summit," he said.

Cook said discussion on the currency crisis in Asia was also important

to Europe as what happened in this side of the world had also affected European countries.

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