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Efforts to put out Sepang peat fires continue

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SEPANG, Mon. - The bush fires on both sides of the Expressway Lingkarang Tengah (Elite) highway have been contained but work continues to prevent them from spreading.

Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Abu Hassan Omar said today the various agencies were working towards putting them out.

"The fires are now under control. I am happy with the effort that has been put in by the various agencies which have been working together as a team.

"However, the team faces some difficulty in putting out the fires because the land is made of peat soil and the fires are deep underground," he told reporters after touring the site of the fires, together with Chief Secretary to the Government, Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali.

Abu Hassan said Abdul Halim would convey a request for another helicopter from the Royal Malaysian Air Force for water bombing sorties to Defence Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

This, he said, was because there was only one RMAF S-61 Nuri helicopter given by the Ministry, and this was insufficient.

Abu Hassan also appealed to the mining companies to play their part by sending water pumps to put out the flames.

"At the moment, apart from pumps provided by the Drainage and Irrigation Department, mining companies Timah Langat Sdn Bhd and Petaling Tin Sdn Bhd have sent several pumps to help us but this is not enough," he said.

He added that the Defence Ministry would also be asked to provide airplanes for cloud-seeding.

Abu Hassan said the Selangor Department of Environment had detected open burning in nearby Kampung Indah and the department was currently in the process of investigating the incident.

He added that he had asked the State Orang Asli Affairs Department to advise residents of five settlements in the area not to conduct open burning.

It is learnt that operations are under way to pump water into a water trench running along the reserve and leading to Sungai Langat.

The trench will be dammed up to allow water in it to overflow into the wetlands surrounding it, thus putting out the underground fires.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad warned those responsible for open burning in the Kuala Langat forest reserve that they could face imprisonment.

Dr Mahathir, who visited the site of the fires, had said that land clearing through open burning by irresponsible people had caused the fires, affecting 50 hectares of the forest reserve.

He said although the authorities were working round-the-clock to put out the fires, open burning in the forest reserve had worsened the situation.

A 292-man team from the Fire and Rescue Department, police, armed forces, Civil Defence Department, Rela, DOE, DID and Kuala Langat District Council are involved in the operations.

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