

03 MAY 1998

Mahathir-Haze

M'SIA TO COOPERATE WITH NEIGHBOURS TO FIGHT HAZE

KUALA LUMPUR, May 3 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia will cooperate with its neighbours to put in place all facilities to protect the venues of the 16th Commonwealth Games here from the haze problem.

"We are working hard to ensure that there is no haze during the Games," he said after a meeting with the Games volunteers at the Mines exhibition centre in Sri Kembangan, near here.

He said the measures to be taken to tackle the problem included cloud-seeding to increase the rainfall and efforts to make the air cleaner and clearer.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would extend assistance to Indonesia if forest fires break out in that country during the Games. This included sending firemen and equipment to combat such fires.

He said Malaysia would also help Indonesia to carry out cloud-seeding to induce rain in areas affected by the fires.

"It will not be an easy task to handle but we are sure that we can reduce the amount of haze," he said.

The hazy condition in several parts of the region is blamed on open burning activities and forest fires.

Asked what would become of the Games' facilities after the staging of the event, scheduled from Sept 11 to 21, Dr Mahathir said the government would take steps to promote a wider usage of such facilities.

"There will be more competition, open championships and also events not necessarily related to sports," he said, adding that they could be for entertainment purposes and big gatherings.

During the meeting with 5,000 volunteers, he said the government spent about RM1 billion to build stadiums and sport complexes for the Games.

On allegations that foreign athletes might not be participating in the Games due to the haze situation, Dr Mahathir said he had not heard about them.

"This is the kind of rumours that we normally hear," he said.

-- BERNAMA

ARA HS JK