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PM: Malaysia will work with neighbours to fight haze

Adeline Ong

MALAYSIA will cooperate with its neighbours to put in place all facilities to protect the venues of the 16th Commonwealth Games from the haze problem, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

He said that Malaysia and its neighbours, namely Indonesia, are working hard to ensure that the country is free from haze during the Games. The Commonwealth Games will be held from September 11 to 21.

"The measures to be taken to tackle the haze problem will include cloud-seeding to increase the rainfall and efforts to make the air cleaner and clearer.

"Malaysia will extend assistance to Indonesia if forest fires break out in Indonesia during the times of the Games. This includes sending our firemen and equipment to combat such fires.

"Malaysia will also help Indonesia to carry out cloud-seeding to induce rain in areas affected by fires," he said.

He spoke to reporters after addressing some 5,000 volunteers of the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Dr Mahathir explained that such a task is not an easy one to handle but said that he was sure that Malaysia can reduce the amount of haze.

Meanwhile, when asked what will become of the Games' facilities after the Commonwealth Games, Dr Mahathir said the Government will take steps to promote a wider usage of such facilities.

"There will be more competitions, open championships and also events not necessarily related to sports such as entertainment purposes and big gatherings," he said.

The Government has spent about RM1 billion to build stadiums and sport complexes around the country for the Games. He added that about 90 per cent of the funds pledged have already come in.

Asked if he heard 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.

When asked what he will do differently if given another chance, Dr Mahathir said that he will probably ask for the stadiums to be wholly-enclosed as that will facilitate the control of the atmosphere inside.

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