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## Indonesia hails PM's offer to help tackle forest fires

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Indonesia has welcomed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's offer of help to fight forest fires in light of its inability to do so adequately because of the economic slowdown.

Its People's Welfare and Poverty Alleviation Minister Professor Dr Haryono Suyono said today the offer was testimony of the close friendship enjoyed by both nations.

"What makes the relationship even more meaningful is that both countries are always willing to help each other out in difficult times.

"Malaysia has proven the saying that a friend in need is a friend indeed.

"I will submit a report on what I have gathered during my visit here to President B.J. Habibie and I believe he will also thank Malaysia and Dr Mahathir for the offer of assistance," he said after witnessing the Fire and Rescue Department's rescue demonstration at Taman Tasik Titiwangsa today.

Haryono, who was accompanied by Information Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Rahmat who is also the National Disaster Relief and Management Committee chairman, spent about an hour witnessing the demonstration.

Two Mi-17 helicopters, belonging to the Fire and Rescue Department, demonstrated their water bombing and forest fire-fighting capabilities. There was also a water rescue demonstration by the department's scuba team.

Haryono said Indonesia was unable to emulate Malaysia's fire-fighting and rescue capabilities because of the economic situation.

Meanwhile, Fire and Rescue Department director-general Datuk Soh Chai Hock said the department was prepared to send a team of fire-fighters to Indonesia should the Government decide to so.

He said the department was training firemen for such missions since the first batch of firemen was sent to Indonesia in 1997.

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