

07 MAY 1999

Fires

M'SIAN FIRE-FIGHTERS READY TO HELP INDONESIA AGAIN

KUALA LUMPUR, May 7 (Bernama) -- Multi-skilled Malaysian firefighters are in a state of high-alert to again help fight forest fires in Indonesia and other countries in the region if instructed, Fire and Rescue Service Director-General Datuk Soh Chai Hock said today.

He told reporters this after a fire-fighting and rescue demonstration at Lake Titiwangsa here for an Indonesian delegation attending the meeting of the Malaysia-Indonesia Disaster Management Joint Commission.

Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, who is chairman of the National Disaster Management and Relief Committee and the Indonesian Minister for Peoples' Welfare and Poverty Alleviation Prof Dr Haryono Soyono witnessed the hour-long demonstration which included air-borne rescue.

Soh said since the last major haze, Malaysian fire-fighters have been trained in various skills to keep them on a high state of readiness.

"Because fire fighting is a borderless operation, we're ready to help other countries if we're asked to and if the government gives the okay," he said.

During the 1997 regional haze caused by forest fires in Indonesia, the government despatched 1,268 Malaysian firefighters to the republic for an operation that altogether cost US\$10 million, he said.

Earlier, Prof Haryono said the Malaysia Fire and Rescue Service has sophisticated equipment and rapid-response capabilities to deal with disasters.

Haryono is also chairman of Indonesia's disaster management and coordination committee.

He said that when he called on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday, the prime minister assured him that Malaysia was prepared to help Indonesia fight future forest fires.

He said Dr Mahathir also suggested that he see for himself the capabilities of the Malaysian fire fighters.

"From what I've seen today, it is clear that Malaysia is not only in a state of readiness to give assistance but has also the equipment and professional manpower. They are battle-ready anytime," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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