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Najib: Jokowi regrets haze

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Indonesian leader feels embarrassed and pressured, says PM

RAHIMY RAHIM
in Jakarta



JAKARTA: Indonesian President Joko Widodo has expressed regret over the haze which hit Malaysia.

The Indonesian leader, who is popularly known as Jokowi, gave his views during a meeting with Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak at the Bogor Presidential Palace here yesterday.

"Indirectly, he apologised and understands, and even felt pressured and embarrassed.

"This is because it is a complicated situation, but it was never his intention to allow it to happen," the Prime Minister told Malaysian journalists after the meeting.

Najib is on a two-day working visit to Indonesia to boost bilateral cooperation in the palm oil industry and to iron out environmental issues.

A Malaysian Bombardier 41SMP plane has been deployed in a multinational team of seven helicopters and three fixed-wing aircraft for water bombing operations in south Sumatra which began yesterday morning.

Najib said Malaysia was willing to extend more help in terms of manpower and equipment.

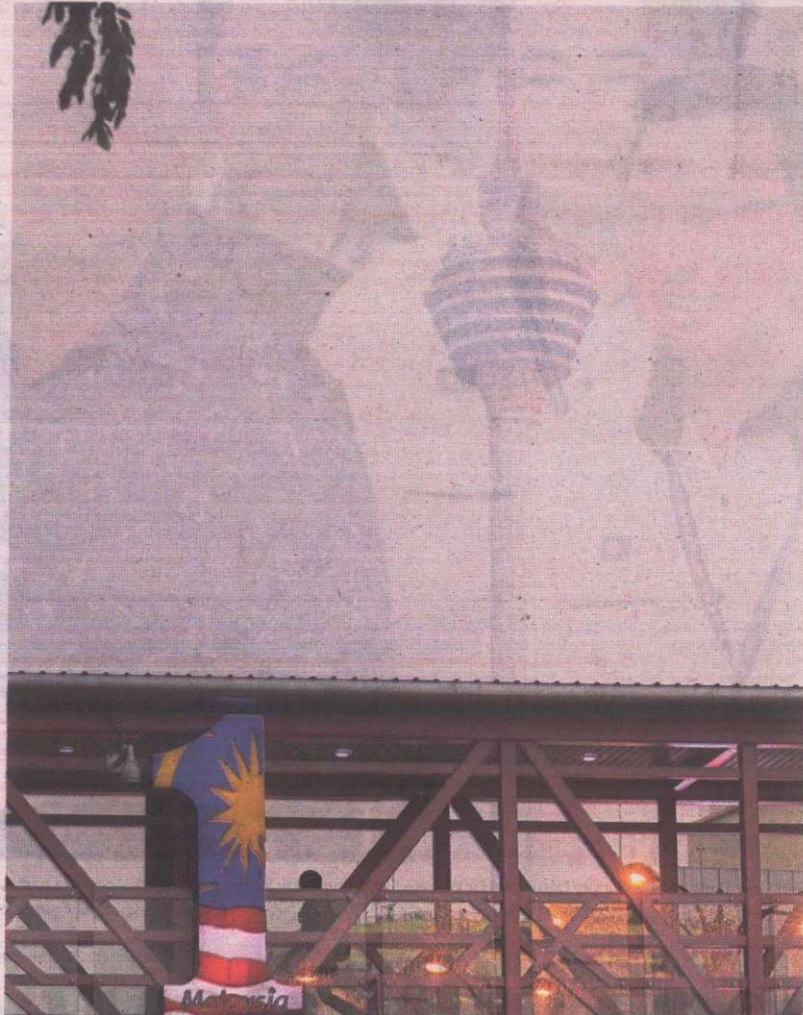
He said the ongoing haze problem was caused by certain quarters who used the "slash and burn" technique to clear land for cultivation.

"If they do not use the 'slash-and-burn' technique, the cost will be 40 times higher to clear the land," he said.

Asked if Malaysia will take legal action against firms responsible for the burning, Najib said it would be up to Indonesia to enforce its laws.

"We were informed that plantation companies were only responsible for 3% of the fires," he said.

Najib proposed that Indonesia fit tube wells into peat soil to prevent fire and haze as successfully done in Malaysia.



Still hazy:
Kuala Lumpur being shrouded by haze at 5.30pm yesterday. — AZLINA ABDULLAH/ The Star

"Indonesia initially wanted to build a network of canals, but we believe this will take too long.

"I informed President Jokowi that the haze affected Malaysia, especially in health, transport, school schedule and also our socio-economy as a whole," Najib said, adding

that Jokowi was receptive to Malaysia's idea.

Malaysia and Indonesia also announced the setting up of the Council of Palm Oil Producing Countries aimed at boosting cooperation between the two biggest palm oil producers.

"The cooperation will bring many benefits to smallholders and the industry as a whole.

"The council is set to create a global standard for a sustainable palm oil industry, cooperate on the volume of the stockpile and create a formal structure," said Najib.