

DR M: LAW AGAINST ERRANT FIRMS MULLED

Malaysian firms
causing fires
outside country
may be punished,
says PM

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THE government may pass a law to prosecute Malaysian plantation companies guilty of causing fires on their property even if it is outside Malaysia, said Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday.

Speaking after the launch of the Foreign Policy Framework of the New Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said the law would be used against companies which failed to put out the forest fires and were part-

ly responsible for the haze.

"We will ask them (Malaysian companies abroad) to take action to put out the fire.

"But, of course, if we find them unwilling to take action (to extinguish the fire), we may have to pass a law to punish those responsible for fires on their property, even if it is outside Malaysia," he added.

He said this was among the matters which were discussed during the cabinet meeting yesterday.

"The cabinet also discussed that we should publicise the actual effects (of haze) and provide information through government statements, as well as (information on) where the hotspots are," he said.

He said among the measures taken so far to tackle haze were cloud seeding and closing of schools.

Reuters quoted Indonesia's Environment Minister Siti Nurbaya Bakar as saying that there were four Malaysian companies out of

at least 30 companies whose oil palm plantations in Indonesia had been sealed off for allegedly being responsible for the fires.

Siti Nurbaya reportedly named the firms as Sime Darby Plantation Bhd's unit Sime Indo Agro based in West Kalimantan; IOI Corp Bhd's unit Sukses Karya Sawit; and TDM Bhd's unit Rafi Kamajaya Abadi.

In a separate report by CNNIndonesia.com, Siti Nurbaya also identified PT Adei Plantation and Industry, whose land in the Riau province had been sealed off.

Kuala Lumpur Kepong Bhd is the biggest shareholder in PT Adei.

On whether schools nationwide should be closed until the haze improves, Dr Mahathir said the government would decide on the closure based on the day-to-day reading of the Air Pollutant Index.

"We can't just close schools, we have to look at how bad is the haze. The readings are not the same everywhere," he said.