

Govt mulling action against polluters: Tun Mahathir

Legislation on the cards to punish local firms responsible for causing haze, says PM

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PUTRAJAYA: As the haze worsens across Southeast Asia, the Malaysian government is mulling a proposal to punish local companies responsible for the problem.

Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said these included companies that operate outside the country.

"We will first ask these companies to put out the fires on their lands. If they are unwilling to take action to put out the fires, we will have to pass a law to hold them responsible for contributing to the haze," he said after launching the New Malaysia Foreign Policy Framework yesterday.

"We want to take action against Malaysian companies that are contributing to the haze problem."

If enacted, Malaysia will become the second

country in the region after Singapore to have such a legislation. Under Singapore's Transboundary Haze Pollution Act, companies and individuals based on the island republic can be prosecuted for causing pollution in other countries.

Mahathir said the haze issue had been raised with the Indonesian government but it has denied responsibility.

"Instead, Indonesia claims that we are causing the haze."

Jakarta has singled out a local subsidiary of a Malaysian company which it claimed was responsible for open burning in Indonesia.

Mahathir said the government would deal with the issue by directing the relevant government agencies to publish daily information on hotspots.

"We will use satellite imagery and pictures to highlight the hotspots."

He said the issue was raised at yesterday's

Cabinet meeting and it was decided that this would be one of the ways to deal with the haze issue.

He said cloud seeding would continue but the authorities must also consider other ways to deal with the problem, including spraying water in badly affected areas.

PKR president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said companies, both local and foreign, that contribute to the haze must be held responsible and should shoulder the losses to the economy.

In an interview with Bloomberg, Anwar said the matter should not be taken lightly considering the extent and impact of the haze to the economy and the population.

He said the government should be more assertive in taking action against the perpetrators.

"We should feel outraged and I consider this ecological warfare. It is not a small matter. It is affecting essentially millions of our people.

"We (government) have to be stronger, regardless of whether the companies are Malaysian, Singaporean or Indonesian. Why are we not making sure that they are being held accountable, bearing at least part of the costs?"