

Haze: DAP to push for more bite in environs bill
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By Lee Shi-Ian

The Opposition will push for amendments to the Environmental Quality Act, seeking for stiff punishment against companies which contribute to the annual haze problem, when Parliament sits on Monday.

DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng said local and foreign companies in Malaysia who directly or indirectly contributed to the haze by causing forest fires in Indonesia should be hauled up.

Lim said the public was expecting the new parliamentarians to take immediate action on the haze issue, adding that he had directed Kulai MP Teo Nie Ching to present such proposals.

"Once Parliament sits next week, Teo will present the proposals in an urgent motion," Lim said.

"These proposed laws will be the immediate task of the new group of MPs to allow Malaysia to take action against any local or foreign company operating here who have contributed to the problem.

"If these companies were responsible or played a part directly or indirectly in the transboundary fires in Indonesia, they should be punished.

"These irresponsible companies should be punished with imprisonment, substantial fines and be liable for the damage caused."

Lim also pointed out that Indonesia was the only Asean member not to have ratified a 2002 Southeast Asian Transboundary Haze Agreement (Seatha). The agreement allows the 10 countries in Asean to cooperate to prevent and extinguish forest fires.

Lim called on Indonesia to take full responsibility for their failure to fulfill their international obligations under the Asean Cooperation Plan on Transboundary Pollution to prevent illegal burning of forests.

"This regional haze issue has become an annual problem over the last 20 years and yet it has not been solved despite it endangering the public.

"In September 1997, the government was forced to declare a state of emergency after the API in Sarawak breached the 600 mark."

Only pharmacies, clinics, shops and necessity service industries were allowed to open for business, which caused economic losses of almost RM27 billion in Southeast Asia.

"Malaysia has suffered enough in terms of health problems and economic losses. The government must pressure Indonesia to ratify the 2002 Seatha in Asean summits to resolve the problem."

Lim called on the government to also begin immediate cloud seeding in the worst affected states of Malacca and Johor to reduce the worsening haze. - June 21, 2013.

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