

DPM Calls For Focus On Regional Efforts To Prepare For Disasters

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ALOR SETAR, May 25 (Bernama) -- The devastating earthquake which struck Nepal recently is a clarion call for all to focus on regional efforts towards preparing for disasters, Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said.

Speed, efficiency and good coordination, he said, were crucial in the early response efforts to minimise human and economic cost of the disasters.

"Simply possessing response plans is not enough to ensure effective response in the aftermath of a disaster. Plans must be regularly exercised. Gaps should be identified and addressed," he said during the opening ceremony of the ASEAN Regional Forum Disaster Relief Exercise 2015 (ARF DiREx) here today.

Muhyiddin, who is also the National Disaster Committee Chairman, said, as the impact and complexity in responding to each disaster differed in each case, it was imperative to continuously improve based on the lesson learned.

He said being in a region prone to natural disaster than those in other parts of the world, Southeast Asian's countries were more likely to be affected by natural catastrophe than those in Europe and Africa.

The earthquake which struck Nepal a month ago, claimed more than 8,000 lives and injuring tens of thousands more.

Muhyiddin said, at the end of last year, Malaysia had also suffered its worst monsoon floods since 1971, which hit the states of Kelantan, Pahang, Kedah and Perak, affecting half a million of people and causing damage estimated at RM2.8 billion.

The deputy prime minister said the floods really tested Malaysia's National Security Council Directive No.20, which regulates the policy and mechanism of disaster management in Malaysia.

As a result, the government is now working to improve its standard operating procedures and guideline based on the lessons learned in facing obstacles and challenges, he said.

"Given the increased frequency and magnitude of floods, we must recognise that it is no longer a remote scenario that Malaysia may one day need to call for international assistance," said Muhyiddin.

Muhyiddin said the decision to co-host the ARF-DiREx 2015 with China could not have come at a better time as countries have to start looking into large-scale disaster response and recovery, which include international assistance.

The ARF-DiREx, according to the deputy prime minister, was one of the most inclusive simulation exercises in the Asia Pacific region, involving multiple agencies from the ARF participating countries, civil-military actors, as well as local and international humanitarian players.

Coordination issues and complexity of the international humanitarian architecture as exercised in the ARF DiREx represents the actual situation when a disaster occurs, he said.

"Through this exercise, participating countries will verify and improve relevant international and regional Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief (HADR) instruments," he said.

The exercise, which will be participated by search and rescue personnel from 22 countries, said Muhyiddin, was based on a hypothetical scenario of the landing of a super typhoon in Northern Peninsular Malaysia.

The main focus of ARF-DiREx, according to him, would be to test the civilian-military coordination in disaster relief, create synergy and synchronise efforts towards supporting the implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Disasters Management and Emergency Response (AADMER).

Also present during the ceremony were State Councillor for the People's Republic of China Wang Yong and Menteri Besar of Kedah and Perlis Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir and Datuk Azlan Man.

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