

Indonesia Prepared To Accept Malaysia's Proposal To Build Tube Wells To Curb Forest Fires **Bernama**

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By Azeman Ariffin

JAKARTA, Oct 11 (Bernama) -- The Indonesian government is prepared to study Malaysia's suggestion to build tube wells as a method to check peat soil fires in plantation areas, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

He said President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) accepted the view and would send authorities to determine the effectiveness of the tube wells in question, especially like those found in Sabah and Sarawak.

Najib said, initially, Indonesia proposed the construction of a canal which was expected to be completed in three years as a long-term measure to overcome forest and plantation fires.

"To us, three years is too long because it means the country is forced to face the haze for three more years, and we proposed building tube wells as it was effective in Malaysia," he said after a meeting Jokowi at the Presidential Palace in Bogor this evening.

The Prime Minister said tube wells have been effective in checking peat soil fires because water is channeled underground systematically.

Najib said, earlier, he had raised the problem of haze to Jokowi and stated that it had threatened the interests of the people of Malaysia and disrupted the economic, social and educational activities including leisure and sports which could not be conducted.

He said Jokowi also revealed his reactions at facing the pressure of forest fire problems in his country and understood the problems posed by the haze.

He said, during bilateral discussions, Malaysia had stated its preparedness to boost the cooperation to overcome forest fires taking place now by dispatching water bombing aircraft and to increase aid when needed.

On allegations that two Malaysian plantation companies were involved in the open burning cases, Najib said legal action was under the jurisdiction of Indonesia.

However, he said only three per cent of forest fire cases were committed by plantation companies as most were carried out by Indonesians who were taking a shortcut to open new land.

He said most of the people in the interior were poor and they could not afford to open vast tracts of land due to the high costs and as such they resorted to forest burning to open new land.

The forest fires had resulted in serious haze in Malaysia and other neighbouring countries with Air Pollutant Index readings at very unhealthy levels and forcing the government to close schools in several states in a move to safeguard the health of students.

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