
MALAYSIA TO TAKE HAZE WOES TO ASEAN

20.09.2019

The Strait Times (20 September 2019)

Malaysia will appeal to Asean to push for a "more effective mechanism" to combat the regional haze, after revealing that Jakarta rejected its offer to help douse forest fires raging in Indonesia.

Environment Minister Yeo Bee Yin told reporters yesterday that other initiatives, such as cloud seeding and a proposed law to punish Malaysian companies causing fires overseas, would fall short of solving the problem without "international cooperation to overcome the transboundary haze".

"I will have a teleconference with the Asean secretary-general to put forward our views and hopes, (so) that there will be a more effective mechanism to tackle this problem in the long term," she said after a briefing on cloud seeding yesterday.

This is the third cloud-seeding operation over Peninsular Malaysia since Monday. It brought torrential rain but only short-term relief as smoke continues to blow in from Indonesia.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday he wanted to know why Indonesian President Joko Widodo did not want Kuala Lumpur's water-bombing aircraft to help put out fires that have blanketed neighbouring Malaysia and Singapore in haze.

More than 2,000 schools in Malaysia have had to close because of the haze, affecting two million students, while the number seeking outpatient care at public hospitals for eye-related issues has increased by 30 per cent.

Meanwhile, more flights were cancelled yesterday due to poor visibility, affecting those travelling to Johor Baru and Singapore from Ipoh airport. Some flights from Sibul, Sarawak, were also grounded.

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