

22 SEP 1997

LEAD Haze-Roundup

AIR POLLUTANT INDEX FOR KUCHING BREACHES 700

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 22 (Bernama) -- The air quality in most parts of the country worsened today with Kuching breaching the 700 mark on the Air Pollutant Index (API) for the first time.

According to the API issued by the Department of Environment (DOE) the air quality in Kuching was well above the hazardous level with a reading of 714 at 8pm.

The air quality over Nilai in Negeri Sembilan was at a very unhealthy level of 240 at 5pm while Gombak reached the hazardous level with the API at 331 at 5pm.

Kuala Lumpur air was very unhealthy with a reading of 260 at 5pm compared to 233 at 11am today. Petaling Jaya also had a very unhealthy API Index of 235 compared to 230 earlier in the day.

Areas recording unhealthy air quality were Shah Alam (204), Klang (186), Melaka (118), Jerantut, Pahang (108) and Kota Kinabalu (142).

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia would send a team comprising members of the Special Malaysian Assistance Rescue Team (Smart) and Fire and Rescue Services Department personnel to Indonesia to help put out its forest fires.

He said that the team would bring with them equipment to draw water from underground wells as some areas in Kalimantan were experiencing drought, in the fire-fighting operation.

In Ipoh Gerakan Youth Chief Chang Ko Youn said the Environment Ministry should enlist the help of the police in enforcement and members of voluntary organisations such as the Rukun Tetangga and residents associations can report to the police about open burning.

Meanwhile, the Civil Defence Department here had frozen the leave for all its personnel in preparation for any eventuality, following the worsening haze situation.

Its director-general, Abdul Whahid Selamat, said in a statement that its staff had also been directed to be in constant contact with its state branches.

In another development, the Sabah Fire and Rescue Services Department will send 80 firemen including 30 from Sandakan and Tawau to fight forest fires raging in East Kalimantan.

Its director Frankie Yun Leong said 50 firemen from here would leave for Sandakan today en route to Tawau. They will later be flown by the Royal Malaysia Air Force (RMAF) to Balikpapan, East Kalimantan.

"Their flight to Balikpapan depends on the haze situation. They will be there for at least two weeks," he told reporters.

In JAKARTA, Indonesian President Suharto said he had agreed to accept Malaysia's assistance to tackle the haze problem in the country.

Minister Coordinator for Social Welfare Azwar Anas said after a meeting with Suharto today that Malaysia had offered to send more than 1,200 firefighters and medical personnel to Sumatra. -- BERNAMA

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