

22 SEP 1997

Haze-Confusion

CONFUSION REIGNS OVER HAZE EMERGENCY ORDER

KUCHING, Sept 22 (Bernama) -- Many people here are confused as to whether the Haze Emergency declared for Sarawak on Friday is still in force or otherwise.

The "Selamat Pagi Bumi Kenyalang" radio programme of RTM Kuching was jammed with angry calls this morning from the public wanting to know whether they need to send their children to school or resume work today.

The programme's deejay Jamayah Pawi had a hard time explaining to them till the State Security Council issued a statement at 7.30am to clear the air.

The emergency order was issued by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when the Air Pollutant Index (API) in the state far exceeded the hazardous level of between 301 and 500.

Following the declaration, all offices both government and private, schools, factories, plantations, construction sites and quarries were closed.

However, food outlets, markets, supermarkets, clinics, pharmacies, medicine shops and essential services remain open.

Mejar Kamaruddin Ahmad from the operations room of the Sarawak National Security Council office here said schools, kindergartens and factories were to remain close while federal and state government offices and banks would be opened today.

He also said it was up to the discretion of the heads of departments or agencies whether to send their staff for field work.

The hourly API readings are being aired over radio to keep the people informed of the air quality level.

The API reading at 9am today was 569 from 560 at 8am, 551 at 7am and 473 at 1am.

Some callers questioned the accuracy of the API readings as they claimed that the haze was thicker with poorer visibility than that of Friday when the emergency was declared.

Mejar Kamaruddin said the situation was not solely due to the haze but also the mist following cloud-seeding by the Meteorological Services Department and the Royal Malaysia Air Force (RMAF).

He said the situation was expected to ease by afternoon when the mist begins to fizzle out. -- BERNAMA

OPP/CJ TS