

28 SEP 1997

Anwar-Emergency

HAZE EMERGENCY IN SARAWAK LIFTED

KUCHING, Sept 28 (Bernama) -- The state of haze emergency, declared in Sarawak on Sept 19, was lifted today.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who announced this here, said all schools and offices would reopen as usual from tomorrow.

"I wish to express my profound gratitude to various government and private agencies and state leaders for their efforts in combatting the haze," he told a news conference after a brief visit here.

Anwar, however, advised the people to continue wearing masks or cover their nose with a wet towel to prevent from inhaling the polluted air.

He said doctors have advised that a wet towel was more effective than the mask.

Anwar also called on the people to tune in to the radio for the latest Air Pollutant Index (API) readings to know the haze situation in their area.

The Deputy Prime Minister said he signed the letter for the lifting of the haze emergency today and it took effect immediately.

This was the first haze emergency in Malaysia and was declared by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad after the Air Pollutant Index here breached the 600 mark on Sept 19.

All schools and both government and private offices were ordered closed with the exception of those providing essential services.

Sarawak has so far been the most badly affected by the haze compared to other parts of the country. The API in the state touched a high of 851 at 1pm last Tuesday.

Anwar expressed personal thanks to the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) for its help in cloud-seeding operations, and also to the Fire and Rescue Service Department and the Indonesian authorities in Sumatra and Kalimantan for their support.

He said the government was stepping up efforts to tackle at source the haze problem which was mainly caused by forest fires in Kalimantan and Sumatera.

The government was giving all the necessary support to the Indonesian authorities and appreciated the attention given by foreign countries and their move to send experts and equipment to Malaysia and Indonesia to fight the haze, he said.

On the sending of Malaysian fire fighters to Kalimantan to help put out forest fires there, Anwar said there was some delay but the Indonesian government had now given its green light.

Answering a question, he said the government had no plan to introduce new laws on air pollution as the present legislation was adequate. However, stricter enforcement was required.

Industries, motor vehicles and construction sites must be monitored to check the damage they caused to the environment, he said.

"I have also announced some measures that have to be taken by us, (including the) private sector, to bring the haze level down like spraying water from high-rise buildings," Anwar said.

This measures had to be taken seriously as it give temporarily relief and help ease the situation, he said.

He said there should not be any complains about spending a small amount on haze relief actions as the health and safety of the people and the vibrance of the economy were important.

"We have to allocate more funds to fight the haze but it has to be spent wisely and prudently as the public safety is paramount," he said.

On Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, who had been away from the state after the haze emergency was declared, Anwar said "he is due to arrive any time now."

Asked if he (Taib) is abroad on official visit, Anwar would only say: "He is coming back."

Anwar arrived here with Information Minister Datuk Mohamad Rahmat, who is also the chairman of the National Disaster Management and Relief Committee, and Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding.

He was earlier given a briefing on the haze situation at the State Operations Room at Wisma Bapa Malaysia. -- BERNAMA

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