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Sarawak lost RM1 billion during 10-day emergency

Sulok Tawie

KUCHING, Sun. - Sarawak lost RM100 million per day or a total of RM1 billion during the 10-day state of emergency caused by the haze, Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud said today.

He said the losses were suffered by the private and public sectors, the government and individuals.

The emergency was declared by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and announced by the Chief Minister on Sept 19 when the Air Pollutant Index reading in Kuching breached the 500-mark.

The emergency was lifted by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim who visited the State on Sept 28 when the index dropped to over 100.

Taib said this after visiting the Kuching Water Board treatment plant and the RM800,000 temporary rock-filled dam at Batu Kitang which was washed away by strong currents on Friday morning.

Asked to comment on a statement by Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding in Sibu yesterday that Sarawak suffered the most from the haze, Taib said it caused much health problems and economic hardship to the people.

The Chief Minister also criticised the local Press for publishing rumours about shortage of food and other essential items during the emergency.

"Nothing is worse than causing panic among the people," he said, adding that solving the haze problem was much easier than controlling people who had become panicky.

He also hit out at the Press for stating that Sarawak was having an electricity crisis following the low inflow of water at the catchment area of the Batang Ai hydroelectric dam in Sri Aman Division.

On poison-pen letters which made various accusations against him, Taib said he would be forced to take drastic action against the writers if they did not stop such activities.

He said normally he would not bother about such letters, but if they went too far he would be forced to act.

He said he did not think it was necessary to lodge a police report at this stage.

Taib said the writers should reveal their true identities for the public to judge if there was any truth in what they wrote.

Meanwhile, Dr George Chan, the Deputy Chief Minister, who was present at the Press conference, said the dam would not be repaired as it had served its purpose.

"The dam, despite its short life span, managed to control saline water from flowing into the reservoir of the Kuching Water Board.

"Now that we have heavy rain falling in the catchment area over the past few days, the dam is no longer needed," he said.

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