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Haze-Sarawak

IT'S BUSINESS AS USUAL AS SARAWAK ENTERS SECOND DAY OF EMERGENCY

KUCHING, Sept 20 -- It's business as usual for most trading premises and eating outlets here as Sarawak entered the second day of the haze emergency.

The atmosphere was quite a contrast to yesterday when life in most parts of Sarawak almost came to a standstill as the public stayed indoors immediately after the announcement was made by both the federal and state governments.

The state of emergency was declared by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Kuala Lumpur when the Air Pollutant Index (API) hit 646, way beyond the hazardous level of 301-500 early yesterday.

Although the API of 503 at noon today was still at the hazardous level, quite a number of people were seen patronising the various eateries, supermarkets and entertainment centres in the city.

At the weekly Sunday Market at the Satok area here, it was business as usual for hawker Itang Anak Yen, 46, who sells jungle produce.

She said the haze emergency would not stop her from bringing down her goods from her village in Bau district about 50 km away.

Pharmacies are doing brisk business as the health-conscious public queued to purchase surgical masks while private clinics worked overtime treating patients with haze-related ailments.

At some higher institutions of learning such as the Sarawak branch of Mara Institute of Technology (ITM), normal classes are still on as students began to sit for their semester examination from today until October.

A random survey by Bernama showed that most Sarawakians welcomed the unprecedented move to declare a haze emergency in view of the deteriorating situation.

Civil servant Udin Bujang said it was the proper thing for the government to do because the bad visibility and unhealthy air merited such an emergency.

A radio deejay with Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) here, he said the station had announced numerous cancellations of scheduled activities and official functions through its various programmes.

Following the declaration of emergency, the relevant authorities and essential services like the police, army and State Secretary's office here have set up their respective operations rooms to monitor the situation round the clock.

A worker manning a hotline set up by the Sarawak Security Working Committee operations room here said most public enquiries were for the latest update of the haze situation.

In compliance with the current haze emergency, the management of two Sarawak-based English dailies and its Bahasa Malaysia newspaper had decided to cease operations for two days.

The paper, in an announcement on its front page, said it would resume operations on Monday with the hope that the weather conditions and the haze situation would improve. -- BERNAMA

CJ JK