

19 SEP 1997

Haze-Sarawak

STATE SECURITY SWINGS INTO ACTION

KUCHING, Sept 19 (Bernama) -- The Sarawak State Security Committee swung into action this morning following the declaration of a state of emergency as the haze situation worsened.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud immediately convened a meeting of the committee on receiving an Order of Emergency letter signed by the Prime Minister this morning.

He also went on air through RTM Kuching to announce the Prime Minister's declaration of a haze emergency for the state.

The state of emergency was declared after the Air Pollutant Index (API) in Kuching breached the 600 mark this morning, way past the 301-500 hazardous level.

The reading last night had exceeded the 400 level, forcing the government to announce the closure of schools today.

The API reading in Kuching at 10am today was 635 with visibility limited to a mere 200 metres, the worst since the haze began shrouding the state a month ago.

Taib said he received the Order of Emergency letter signed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad early this morning.

At 10am Taib summoned a State Security Committee meeting at the 19th floor of Wisma Bapa Malaysia to mobilise an action plan to handle the emergency situation.

He stressed that the emergency was not a general emergency because of a security threat but rather for the purpose of protecting the health of the people and to prevent any accident from getting rampant.

Last night, the National Disaster Relief Management Committee declared all schools and kindergartens in the state closed until further notice due to the haze.

Taib also said that all departments and agencies and the private sector may allow their employees to take unrecorded leave until the order was lifted.

However, essential services and private sector establishments involved in food and drinks supply and pharmacies are to remain open.

They should also sell their products at normal prices and not cash in on the abnormal situation.

They should regard their operation as a service to the people during this time of emergency, he said.

"This emergency does not mean that there is a curfew but people are advised to stay within their buildings and homes and minimise mobility unless there is some essential thing to do outside," Taib said.

He said, all forms of open burning had been ordered to be stopped and the government would not be forgiving in taking action against the culprits.

The police and military had also been alerted to help to monitor and take stern action against those involved in open burning.

"The situation is already bad and we must not add to the pollution to our air," he added.

He said other activities like quarrying had also been ordered to stop and smokers should not throw their cigarette butts anyhow lest they start a fire.

To support the action of the security forces, he called for the help of the Tuai Rumah and village headmen to check the open burning in their areas

and to report to the relevant authorities if there is any.

Taib also said that the state had also sent a request to the federal government this morning to carry out cloud seeding to create rain to help improve the haze situation especially over densely populated areas.

A check around the city this morning showed that human activities went on as usual but most of the people had taken the precaution of wearing surgical masks.

Meanwhile, Cats Radio, a private radio station here sponsored 10,000 surgical masks this morning for distribution to the public.

The masks were handed over to motorists on their way to work early this morning by the Mayor of Kuching City North Haji Awang Ehsan Awang Joini, Kuching City OCPD ACP Kushaili Suut and Cats Radio chief executive officer, Dr Zuraidi Ishak. -- BERNAMA

opp+rdy JK