

## 'Haze will worsen if fires not brought under control'

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The hazy conditions in the country, particularly in the west coast of the peninsula and west Sarawak, are due to increased hotspots in Sumatra and Kalimantan, Indonesia.

Malaysian Meteorological Department director-general Jailan Simon yesterday said the haze was expected to worsen if open burning in Indonesia was not brought under control.

"The probability of heavy rains in Sumatra, Kalimantan and our country is low in the coming weeks.

"In this regard, the possibility of our country being affected by transboundary haze is still high, especially in the west and south of the peninsula, as well as in west Sarawak. The haze may last until the end of the southwest monsoon."

Malaysians are advised to minimise outdoor activities, wear face masks, drink plenty of water and avoid open burning in the hazy weather.

Up to 7pm yesterday, the Department of Environment (DOE) data showed the Air Pollutant Index (API) was below 100 in Johor Setia Klang.

In Sarawak, Kuching recorded very unhealthy air quality at 227, while Samarahan recorded 202.

Six other areas recorded un-

healthy API. They are Institut Latihan Perindustrian Miri (116), Miri (151), Sibu (103), Sarikei (136), Sri Aman (175) and SK Kuala Baram 2 (117).

The public can refer to the DOE website at [http://apims.doe.gov.my/public\\_v2/home.html](http://apims.doe.gov.my/public_v2/home.html) or by downloading the MyIPU mobile application to get hourly API readings.

Meanwhile, the Asean Specialised Meteorological Centre said the weather remained dry in many parts of Sumatra and Kalimantan yesterday.

"With dry conditions expected to persist over many areas in Sumatra and Kalimantan, hotspot activities and hazy conditions there are likely to continue.

"In Sumatra, persistent hotspots with smoke haze continued to be detected in the provinces of Riau, Jambi, South Sumatra and Lampung.

"Moderate to dense smoke haze from the hotspots in Riau has been blown by the prevailing winds toward the Straits of Malacca.

"In West Kalimantan, moderate to dense smoke haze was observed to emanate from scattered hotspots in the province.

"Some of the smoke haze has been blown by the prevailing winds toward west Sarawak."



The Air Pollutant Index reading in Kuching reached a 'very unhealthy' 227 at 7pm yesterday. PIC BY L. MANIMARAN

'VERY UNHEALTHY'

## UPSR IN SARAWAK TO PROCEED DESPITE HAZE

Disaster Management Committee to hand out 200,000 face masks to exam candidates

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**T**HOUGH schools were expected to be closed once the Air Pollutant Index (API) reading exceeds 201, the Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) would nevertheless continue in Sarawak.

The State Disaster Management Committee secretariat chief, Major Ismail Mahedin, said 200,000 face masks were handed over to the Education Department for distribution to the schoolchildren.

Based on the Standard Operating Procedure, schools must close when API readings reach the "very unhealthy" level.

"School authorities are told to monitor the API reading in their respective areas closely, to encourage and remind the students to use a face mask.

"Principals and headmasters can announce school closure once the area experiences a 'very unhealthy' air quality."

He said there were 12 hotspots detected in Sarawak, 1,087 in Kalimantan and 306 in Sumatra.

Ismail said a total of 40,448 pupils were sitting for the UPSR in Sarawak, which began on Wednesday, before continuing from Sept 10 to 12.

Up to 7pm yesterday, API readings in Samarahan and Kuching were "very unhealthy" at 202 and 227 respectively.

The Fire and Rescue Department has received reports of a total of 97 forest and peatland fires since Sept 1.

An API reading of 0-50 shows good air quality; 51-100, moderate; 101-200, unhealthy; 201-300, very unhealthy; and 300 and above, hazardous.

In **KUALA LUMPUR**, Bernama reports Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan

Ismail said the National Disaster Management Agency and the Sarawak government would provide an allocation for face masks to be distributed to Kuching residents, currently hit by the haze.

She said the Malaysian Meteorological Department was looking into conducting cloud seeding, taking into account the atmospheric conditions in the areas.

"The people, especially those in Sarawak, are advised to stay indoors and to wear face masks when out in the open, to avoid health problems."

Citing a report from the Department of Environment, Dr Wan Azizah said the major factor contributing to the high API readings were the forest fires in Kalimantan and Sumatra, Indonesia.

She said the wind patterns had spread some of the haze across to Malaysia, especially to Sarawak.

"The peat bush fire incident in Kuala Baram and Miri had also resulted in the haze," she said, adding that firefighters were still putting out fires in the area.



Low visibility on the Federal Highway due to the haze in Shah Alam yesterday. PIC BY SADDAM YUSOFF