

# Hazy days till month's end

Poor API to persist without rain and uncontrolled open burning



by CLARISSA CHUNG, RAHIMY RAHIM  
and R. SEKARAN  
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The haze in Malaysia is likely to persist until the end of this month in view of the low chances of heavy rains and the possibility of uncontrolled open burning.

Malaysian Meteorological Department (MetMalaysia) director-general Jallan Simon said the transboundary haze was expected to continue until the southwest monsoon period ends in late September.

"Chances of heavy rain in Sumatra, Kalimantan, Indonesia and our country are low in the coming week. As such, the possibility of the country experiencing transboundary haze is still high, especially for the western and southern regions of the peninsula and west Sarawak," he said in a statement yesterday.

He said the haze shrouding several areas in the country, especially in the west coast of the peninsula and west Sarawak, was due to the increase in hotspots in Sumatra and Kalimantan. The haze, he said, would worsen if open burning in the neighbouring country was left uncontrolled. Yesterday, nine areas nationwide were flagged as having worrying air pollutant index (API) levels.

Eight of these areas were in Sarawak, with Kuching and Samarahan recording a "very unhealthy" API level of over 200.

Kuching had the most polluted air quality yesterday, with its API level hitting 221 as at 5pm. Samarahan recorded a level of 203.

In Peninsular Malaysia, the API level in Johor Bahru in Klang was at 105.

An API reading of between 0 and 50 is good; 51 to 100 (moderate); 101 to 200 (unhealthy); 201 to 300 (very unhealthy); and 301 and above is considered hazardous.

While other areas nationwide recorded "mod-



**Smoky gloom:** Claudia Freddy and Rita Patrick taking a selfie on the Darul Hana Bridge in Kuching. The city recorded an unhealthy API reading of 206 yesterday.

erate" API levels, some were close to being categorised as "unhealthy".

Among others, Petaling Jaya and Shah Alam were at 96. These two areas had API levels ranging between 64 and 70 last week.

Other areas with high API levels yesterday included Nilai in Negri Sembilan (95), Putrajaya (96) and Kangar (90).

Hourly API readings are available on the Department of Environment (DOE) website at <http://apims.doe.gov.my>.

Data from the Asean Specialised Meteorological Centre (ASMC) showed five hotspots in Peninsular Malaysia and another five across the South China Sea on Sept 6.

The hotspot count on that day also showed that Kalimantan recorded 780 hotspots while Sumatra had 66.

An update by ASMC on Friday said generally dry conditions were expected to prevail in the southern Asean region.

"With the weather likely to remain generally dry over the next few days, the hotspot and haze situation in Sumatra and Kalimantan can be expected to persist," the update said.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail said yesterday that MetMalaysia was studying the feasibility of cloud seeding to induce rain in areas affected by haze.

Dr Wan Azizah also said the National Disaster Management Agency (Nadma) and the Sarawak government would allocate funds to provide masks to the people in the state.

As for students sitting for the Mathematics and Science papers of the UPSR examination in areas affected by haze in Sarawak next week, they will be provided with face masks.

Bernama, quoting head of the Sarawak disaster management committee secretariat, Major Ismail Mahedin from the Sarawak Civil Defence Force, reported that the face masks had been handed over to the state education department for distribution to students in Kuching, Samarahan, Serian and Sri Aman.

"If the API readings exceed 201, schools will be closed but the UPSR examination will go on as scheduled under strict supervision by the school and exam invigilators," he said in a statement.

A total of 40,448 students are sitting for the UPSR in the state. The Mathematics and Science papers are scheduled for Sept 10 to 12.

Sarawak Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Amar Douglas Uggah Embas said the Federal Government must be more assertive in calling for Indonesia to deal with open burning.

Putrajaya must consult with Jakarta on how to resolve the issue, he was quoted as saying by Bernama.