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NO RESPITE

'HAZE TO WORSEN'

Number of patients seeking treatment expected to increase significantly, says deputy health minister.

KUALA LUMPUR

THE haze in the country is expected to worsen, said Deputy Health Minister Dr Lee Boon Chye.

He said the current wind direction would bring the transboundary haze here from the forest fires in Indonesia, particularly in Kalimantan.

The Health Ministry, he said, expected the number of patients seeking treatment for respiratory-related ailments at public clinics and hospitals to increase significantly during the haze.

"When the Air Pollutant Index (API) gets higher, individuals without any respiratory illnesses are likely to have symptoms such as dry eyes and throat irritation.

"For individuals with respiratory illnesses such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, the symptoms are expected to worsen.

"Reduce outdoor activities. But if such activities are necessary, wear a mask, drink lots of water and see a doctor if you display any symptoms."

Dr Lee was speaking after of-

ficiating the RESPIRE 2019 annual general meeting here yesterday.

Despite the haze, the Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah examination will continue for thousands of schoolchildren.

Sarawak, the worst-hit by the haze, has 40,448 pupils sitting the UPSR. Mathematics and Science papers were scheduled for yesterday until Sept 12.

The Sarawak Education Department yesterday said 409 schools (347 primary and 62 secondary schools) were closed due to worsening air quality.

The closure involved 157,479 students in nine districts.

The most affected district was Padawan, at 101 schools, followed by Kuching (87), Betong (53), Bau (44), Sri Aman (41), Lubok Antu (30), Lundu (30), Serian (20) and Samarahan (three).

The National Union of Teaching Profession (NUTP) urged schools to follow the instructions issued by the Education Ministry in the circular issued this year on autonomy for schools to decide to shut if the API exceeded 200 (very unhealthy).

NUTP secretary-general Harry Tan Huat Hock said schools should adhere to the circular and not jeopardise students' health, adding that schools should conduct indoor sports.

The haze has not affected programmes for national athletes.

National Sports Council director-general Datuk Ahmad Shajahan Ismail said no outdoor ac-



A hazy view of Kuala Lumpur, as seen from KL Tower, at 4pm yesterday. PIC BY SALHANI IBRAHIM

tivities had been postponed, but athletes had been given guidelines on outdoor activities.

"Athletes are guided by the Sports Institute of Malaysia. If the situation worsens, we will make a decision based on its advice."

Up to 5pm yesterday, seven states in the peninsula registered unhealthy API readings.

The Department of Environment's website showed that Johor Setia in Klang recorded an API of 155, followed by Petaling Jaya (144), Shah Alam (135), Banting (119) and Klang (114).

In the Federal Territories, Putrajaya recorded a reading of 140,

while areas in Kuala Lumpur with unhealthy readings were Batu Muda (166) and Cheras (153).

In Melaka, Bukit Rambai had a reading of 107 and Alor Gajah recorded 103.

In Negri Sembilan, Nilai recorded 148, Seremban (120) and Port Dickson (107).

Sarawak, badly hit in the last few days, had a brief respite yesterday with readings at several API stations dropping from the "very unhealthy" range to "unhealthy".

Sri Aman had a reading of 176, followed by Kuching (141) and Samarahan (119).

Only Kimanis in Sabah recorded a good API reading of 46, while the rest of the nation's API readings were at the moderate level.

API readings are categorised as good (zero to 50), moderate (51-100), unhealthy (101-200), very unhealthy (201-300) and hazardous (301 and above).

For the latest hourly readings, visit apims.doe.gov.my.

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Page 1 pic: Pupils sitting the Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah reciting a prayer to seek a respite from the haze before entering the exam hall in Kuching yesterday.