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Acid rain over Sabah

By KAN YAW CHONG
KOTA KINABALU:
The State Capital recorded the first known instance of acid rain Wednesday night, a University of Malaysia Sabah (UMS) analysis of samples collected during a surprise 10pm downpour revealed.



Dr Jopony

"A laboratory test of the rain water showed a Ph value of 3.85," said Dr Marcus Jopony, lecturer in environmental science at the university's School of Science and Technology.

Dr Jopony said he had done such studies in Kota Kinabalu in the past and had never come across such a low reading.

"All the while, our measurements were consistently above 5.6 with no fluctuations," he said.

"Acid rain is defined as rain with a Ph value of less than 5.2. Certain countries use less than 5.6. Anything lower is considered acid rain," he explained.

He said while carbonic acid is always present in rain water because of mixing with natural carbon dioxide in the air, this historic record of acid rain must be due to the presence of organic acid drifted into our atmosphere from the burning of volatile materials such as the forest fires in Kalimantan and Sumatra.

Asked on the effect of the acid rain, Dr Jopony said 3.85 is "moderate acidity" but "it depends on exactly what contributed to the acidity."

For this reason, he said the UMS will keep monitoring the situation over the next few weeks.

He said the acid rain will not have much impact if it disappears after a few rains.

"But if the high acidity persists, it will definitely have some corrosive effect on our respiratory system and impact on sensitive organisms.

"This can happen when people inhale acidic mists in the morning. Or when the rain is not very heavy, there might be acidic particulates floating in the air," he said.

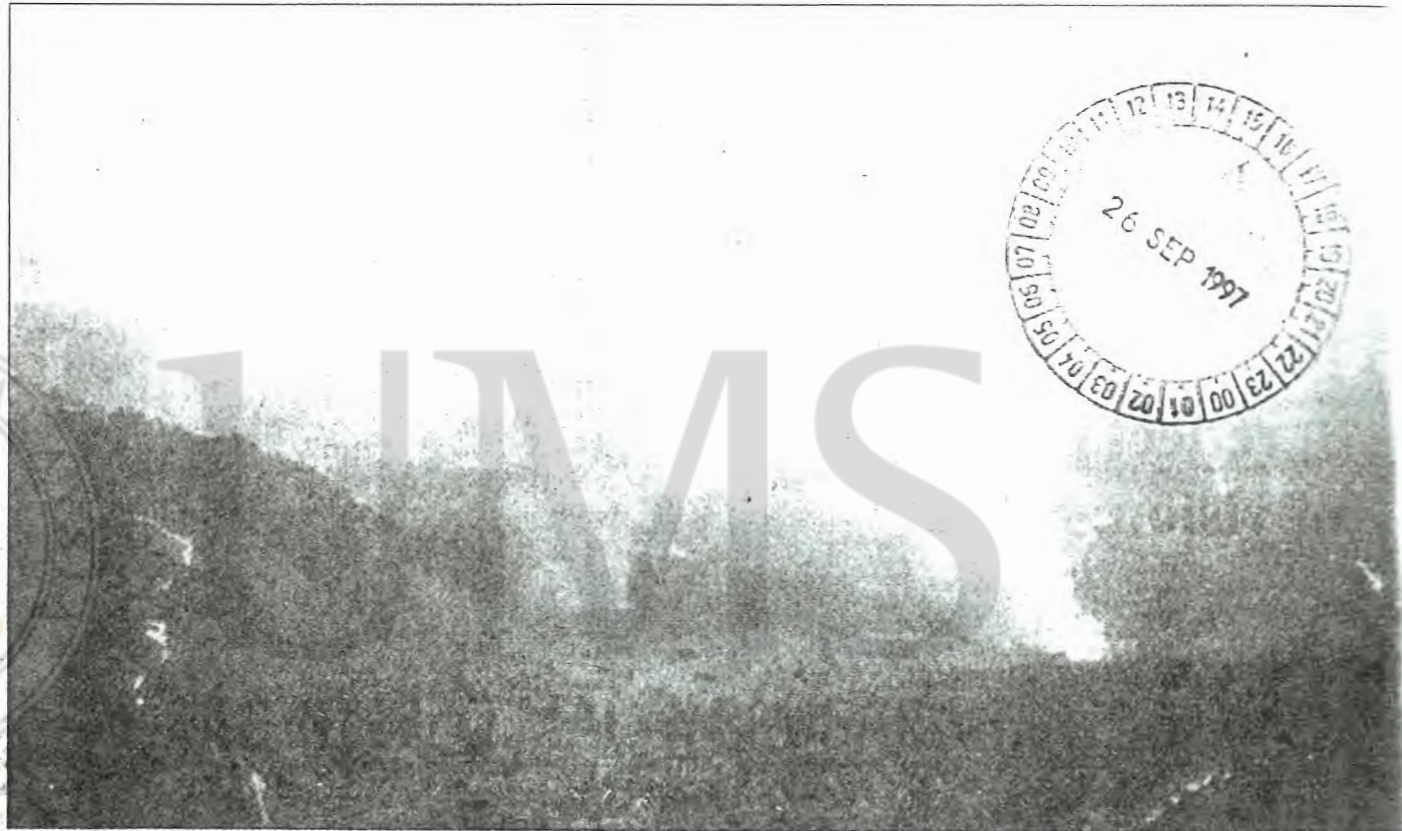
For this reason, he said it is advisable to avoid exposure to rains and wear masks while the haze persists, he said.

In KUCHING yesterday, the Sarawak Health Department warned people there that the inclement weather could bring about acid rain that was harmful to the respiratory system of children and asthmatics.

"When it rains, people should take shelter and not be exposed to it," said its Director Dr Mohd Taha Arif.

For the first time in history, Sarawak was declared a haze emergency state when the Air Pollutant Index (API) breached the 600 mark last Friday, and with no signs of the situation abating.

With the state of emergency enforced for health reasons, government and private offices as well as factories continue to remain closed, except for those offering essential services.



In our midst: Open burnings in Sarawak despite the State being worst affected by haze. - AFP

SABAH AIR POLLUTANT INDEX (API)

10 am	94
11am	88
Noon	82
1pm	75
2pm	69
3pm	64
4pm	58
5pm	54
6pm	53

WHAT TO DO

- a) Drink plenty of water.
- b) See your doctor if you get symptoms like running nose, blocked or dry nose, itchy eyes, sneezing, dry or sore throat.
- c) Don't exert yourself by jogging or other strenuous exercise.
- d) Clean your air-condition filter.
- e) Consider wearing a surgical mask.

Winds, rains minimise haze

KOTA KINABALU: Residents in the State Capital and surrounding areas heaved a sigh of relief Thursday with the haze greatly reduced and the sun shining brightly.

The air quality hovering at the unhealthy level of around 140 under the Air Pollutant Index (API) on Wednesday went down to the moderate level at 94 at 10am Thursday and since then declined further by the hour.

The API dropped to 51 at 7pm, just a point away from "good" air quality.

It was the first time the sky cleared since Saturday when the API hovered between 130 and 180.

The visibility was 8km at 10am and 6km at



However, he warned that the haze may be back if the winds proved only temporary.

"Let's hope it is permanent for a while until the forest fires in Kalimantan subside."

S'kan factories warned