

Sabah bearing brunt of El Nino

Four states recorded highest temperature readings during the equinox

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PETALING JAYA: Four states in the peninsula and Sabah recorded the highest temperature readings in the country yesterday on the day of the equinox smack during the El-Nino phenomenon.

The locations were Chuping in Perlis (39.5°C), Alor Setar in Kedah (39.1), Ipoh in Perak (37.5), and Temerloh in Pahang (37.4) and Keningau (37) in Sabah.

"The readings almost reached danger level, 40°C, which can cause

heatstroke," Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Madius Tangau told reporters after a function in Tuaran in Sabah yesterday.

He said the ministry would continue to monitor developments and share updates on the weather for the attention and action of other ministries as well as the public.

Sabah is bearing the brunt of El Nino which is sending the mercury rising with little rain fall.

Worse still, the dry spell could last until May, according to Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) climatology and oceanography expert

Prof Dr Fredolin Tangang.

"One just has to drive from Kota Kinabalu to Beaufort to see the effects of the El Nino, including the area scorched by fire in Papar," he said in a phone interview with *The Star*.

Most at risk are villagers who rely on streams, rivers and rain for water and whose livelihood are dependent on farming such as hill padi.

He said an 80% drought probability was forecast for northern Sarawak and Sabah in December and it was happening now adding that the drought probability for peninsular Malaysia was forecast at 50%.

Tangang said authorities need to act to lessen the sufferings of the people, especially in the interior regions.

"Likewise, people also need to be cautious not to do open burning or throw cigarette butts by the side of the road," he said.

Meanwhile, Tangau pointed out the highest ever temperature recorded in Malaysia was 40.1°C in Chuping, Perlis on April 9, 1998 during extreme El Nino and not during the equinox.

He also attributed the haze in the Klang Valley to the dry weather, open burning and local bush fires.

The Air Pollutant Index reached unhealthy levels in Cheras (151) Shah Alam (129) and Batu Muda (106) on Saturday.

Terengganu has seen an average of about 10 peat fires a day due to scorching heat.

State Fire and Rescue Department director Azlimin Mat Noor said over the two days, there were 26 peat fires with 18 cases on Saturday and eight yesterday, with the biggest covering about a hectare.

"We have 700 firemen and about 250 volunteers are on standby for any eventualities," he said.



Refreshing shower: Fauziah Harun, 41 cooling off her son Mohd Fariz Furqan, 2 at Youth Park in Penang.



Easy fishing: People catching fish at a pond in Bandar Perda where the water has been partially drained.



Father's love: Safety officer Mohd Nizad Darus, 47, giving his son Hafsyal Hafiz, 7, a drink of water.