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Smog sparks emergency in Malaysia

URL: <http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/0508/050812-smog.html>

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12 August, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Smog sparks emergency in Malaysia

BNE: Malaysia declared a state of emergency on August 11 as the air pollution index rocketed to extremely hazardous levels on its west coast. Smoke from forest fires in Sumatra, Indonesia, has shrouded much of the country in a thick smog, a dangerous concoction of ash, dust, carbon dioxide and sulfur dioxide. The acrid haze has obscured from view the tops of buildings in Kuala Lumpur, where a government official said: "We are now in a state of emergency". Authorities have closed schools and advised people to stay indoors to minimize contact with the noxious and choking fumes. It is Malaysia's worst environmental crisis since 1997 and already there are few signs of it abating.

The Malaysian government is acting quickly to curb the spread of the smog. It has already begun seeding clouds in an attempt to induce rain to wash the pollutants away. It has also offered to send firefighters to Indonesia to help extinguish the out-of-control fires. Officials from both countries are holding crisis talks in the Sumatran city of Medan to find solutions to contain the rampaging blazes. Indonesia's Environment Minister Rachmat Witoelar said: "We need a wetter climate for us to put into effect conducive efforts to put out the fires". However, a meteorology department spokesperson said no respite was expected until October.

WARM-UPS

1. POLLUTION: In pairs / groups, talk about the following types of pollution. Which ones do you think are worst? Air pollution, water pollution, noise pollution, acid rain, hazardous waste, nuclear waste. Which of these affect you now? Which will you worry about in the future?

2. STATES OF EMERGENCY: Have you ever experienced a government state of emergency? In pairs / groups, tell each other of your experiences of any of the following. If you have been state-of-emergency free, talk about what you would do if you experienced one.

- Smog
- Forest / Bush fires
- Hurricanes / Typhoons
- Floods
- Earthquakes
- Civil unrest / War
- Heat waves
- Other

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Malaysia / state of emergency / air pollution / smoke / carbon dioxide / Kuala Lumpur / fumes / environmental crisis / firefighters / wetter climate / October

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. SMOKE: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word “smoke”. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

5. SMOG PROBLEMS: In pairs / groups, talk about which of the following smog problems would bother you most:

- a. Polluted air
- b. Poor visibility in the streets
- c. Not being able to see the sun
- d. Having to wear a facemask outdoors
- e. Being told by your government to stay indoors
- f. The thought that illegal loggers make big profits and cause smog problems
- g. The sudden closure of schools, hospitals and other services
- h. The terrible smell
- i. The potential for incurring health problems

6. QUICK DEBATE: Students A think air quality will be better in 50 years’ time. Students B think air quality will be worse in 50 years’ time. Change partners often.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a. A spark from a firework has created major forest fires in Malaysia. | T / F |
| b. Malaysia has declared a state of emergency. | T / F |
| c. Smog is a dangerous concoction of ash, dust and various gases. | T / F |
| d. The smog produces noxious and choking fumes. | T / F |
| e. Malaysia has been slow to act to curb the spread of the smog. | T / F |
| f. Malaysia is sowing seeds to grow more trees. | T / F |
| g. Malaysian and Indonesian firefighters are holding crisis talks. | T / F |
| h. There will be no let up in the dry conditions until October. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| a. shrouded | restrain |
| b. concoction | douse |
| c. acrid | poisonous |
| d. noxious | mixture |
| e. abating | let-up |
| f. curb | pungent |
| g. induce | diminishing |
| h. extinguish | helpful |
| i. conducive | enveloped |
| j. respite | activate |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. Malaysia declared | view the tops of buildings |
| b. the air pollution index rocketed | concoction |
| c. a dangerous | the out-of-control fires |
| d. The acrid haze has obscured from | until October |
| e. there are few signs | out the fires |
| f. acting quickly to curb | a state of emergency |
| g. help extinguish | of it abating |
| h. contain the rampaging | the spread of the smog |
| i. conducive efforts to put | to extremely hazardous levels |
| j. no respite was expected | blazes |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

ODD WORD OUT: Strike through the word in each group of three in *italics* that does not fit.

Smog sparks emergency in Malaysia

BNE: Malaysia *declared / issued / decried* a state of emergency on August 11 as the air pollution index rocketed to extremely hazardous levels on its west coast. Smoke from forest fires in Sumatra, Indonesia, has *shrouded / blanketed / bedded* much of the country in a thick smog, a dangerous *cocktail / contraption / concoction* of ash, dust, carbon dioxide and sulfur dioxide. The *acid / pungent / aphid* haze has obscured from view the tops of buildings in Kuala Lumpur, where a government official said: "We are now in a state of emergency". Authorities have closed schools and advised people to stay indoors to minimize contact with the *noxious / poisonous / notorious* and choking fumes. It is Malaysia's worst environmental crisis since 1997 and already there are few signs of it *letting up / abating / letting in*.

The Malaysian government is acting quickly to *curb / check / blurb* the spread of the smog. It has already begun seeding clouds in an attempt to *induce / reduce / encourage* rain to wash the pollutants away. It has also offered to send firefighters to Indonesia to help *douse / extinguish / distinguish* the out-of-control fires. Officials from both countries are holding crisis talks in the Sumatran city of Medan to find solutions to contain the rampaging *mazes / blazes / fires*. Indonesia's Environment Minister Rachmat Witoelar said: "We need a wetter climate for us to put into effect *conducive / helpful / helpless* efforts to put out the fires". However, a meteorology department spokesperson said no *let down / let-up / respite* was expected until October.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'state'** and **'emergency'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. ODD WORD OUT: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...? Did you find any relationship between the correct and incorrect words?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "AIR POLLUTION" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about air pollution.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| • declared | • curb |
| • shrouded | • induce |
| • concoction | • extinguish |
| • acrid | • holding |
| • minimize | • rampaging |
| • abating | • respite |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. What were your initial thoughts on this headline?
- b. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- c. What are your thoughts on the smog?
- d. Have you ever experienced a state of emergency?
- e. Who do you think is to blame for the smog?
- f. What would you do if such a poisonous smog descended on your town?
- g. Are you worried about air pollution?
- h. Do you think Malaysia is entitled to sue the Indonesian government?
- i. How is the air quality of the town in which you live?
- j. What is your country's worst ever environmental crisis?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Have you ever witnessed a major blaze?
- d. What do you think are the causes of the fires?
- e. Do you think global warming is contributing to an increase in the number of forest fires around the world?
- f. What natural disasters do you have to worry about in your country?
- g. Do you think air quality will get better or worse over the next 50 years?
- h. What should be done to improve air quality?
- i. Do you think there will be oxygen bars in the future in your town, where we can buy and breathe pure air?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
- b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- c. Was there a question you didn't like?
- d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- e. What did you like talking about?
- f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
- g. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

RATING: Decide which of the people or organizations in the column on the left are to blame for illegal logging and forest fires in Indonesia. Write a value from 1 (zero responsibility) to 10 (extremely blameworthy). Discuss with your partner(s) what actions each of the people / organizations on the list should do to reduce the effects of logging, and so reduce the chances of forest fires and smog.

| PEOPLE / ORGANIZATIONS | VALUE | ACTIONS TO REDUCE ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE |
|--|-------|--|
| Indonesian government | | |
| Logging companies | | |
| Worldwide paper companies | | |
| United Nations | | |
| Local people in the Indonesian forests | | |
| You and I | | |

Change partners and compare what your previous partners said. Who do you think has the best ideas?

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

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BNE: Malaysia _____ a state of emergency on August 11 as the air pollution index rocketed to extremely _____ levels on its west coast. Smoke from forest fires in Sumatra, Indonesia, has shrouded much of the country in a thick smog, a dangerous _____ of ash, dust, carbon dioxide and sulfur dioxide. The acrid haze has _____ from view the tops of buildings in Kuala Lumpur, where a government official said: "We are now in a state of emergency". Authorities have closed schools and advised people to stay indoors to minimize contact with the _____ and choking fumes. It is Malaysia's worst environmental crisis since 1997 and already there are few signs of it _____.

The Malaysian government is acting quickly to _____ the spread of the smog. It has already begun seeding clouds in an attempt to _____ rain to wash the pollutants away. It has also offered to send firefighters to Indonesia to help _____ the out-of-control fires. Officials from both countries are holding crisis talks in the Sumatran city of Medan to find solutions to contain the _____ blazes. Indonesia's Environment Minister Rachmat Witoelar said: "We need a wetter climate for us to put into effect _____ efforts to put out the fires". However, a meteorology department spokesperson said no _____ was expected until October.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on the forest fires in Indonesia and the smog in Indonesia. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson.

3. LETTER: Write a letter to the Indonesian government about the forest fires on Sumatra. Explain what you think of the fires. Explain also what you think the government should do to stop the fires, prevent further blazes and compensate Malaysia. Read your letters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all have similar ideas?

4. DIARY / JOURNAL: Imagine your country has declared a state of emergency. Write your diary / journal entry for one day during the emergency. Read your entry to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. T c. T d. T e. F f. F g. F h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| a. shrouded | enveloped |
| b. concoction | mixture |
| c. acrid | pungent |
| d. noxious | poisonous |
| e. abating | diminishing |
| f. curb | restrain |
| g. induce | activate |
| h. extinguish | douse |
| i. conducive | helpful |
| j. respite | let-up |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. Malaysia declared | a state of emergency |
| b. the air pollution index rocketed | to extremely hazardous levels |
| c. a dangerous | concoction |
| d. The acrid haze has obscured from | view the tops of buildings |
| e. there are few signs | of it abating |
| f. acting quickly to curb the | spread of the smog |
| g. help extinguish | the out-of-control fires |
| h. contain the rampaging | blazes |
| i. conducive efforts to put | out the fires |
| j. no respite was expected | until October |

ODD WORD OUT:

Smog sparks emergency in Malaysia

BNE: Malaysia *declared* / *issued* / ~~*decried*~~ a state of emergency on August 11 as the air pollution index rocketed to extremely hazardous levels on its west coast. Smoke from forest fires in Sumatra, Indonesia, has *shrouded* / *blanketed* / ~~*bedded*~~ much of the country in a thick smog, a dangerous *cocktail* / ~~*contraption*~~ / *concoction* of ash, dust, carbon dioxide and sulfur dioxide. The *acrid* / *pungent* / ~~*aphid*~~ haze has obscured from view the tops of buildings in Kuala Lumpur, where a government official said: "We are now in a state of emergency". Authorities have closed schools and advised people to stay indoors to minimize contact with the *noxious* / *poisonous* / ~~*notorious*~~ and choking fumes. It is Malaysia's worst environmental crisis since 1997 and already there are few signs of it *letting up* / *abating* / ~~*letting-in*~~.

The Malaysian government is acting quickly to *curb* / *check* / ~~*blurb*~~ the spread of the smog. It has already begun seeding clouds in an attempt to *induce* / ~~*reduce*~~ / *encourage* rain to wash the pollutants away. It has also offered to send firefighters to Indonesia to help *douse* / *extinguish* / ~~*distinguish*~~ the out-of-control fires. Officials from both countries are holding crisis talks in the Sumatran city of Medan to find solutions to contain the rampaging ~~*mazes*~~ / *blazes* / *fires* . Indonesia's Environment Minister Rachmat Witoelar said: "We need a wetter climate for us to put into effect *conducive* / *helpful* / ~~*helpless*~~ / efforts to put out the fires". However, a meteorology department spokesperson said no ~~*let-down*~~ / *let-up* / *respite* was expected until October.