currentkids

Blue skies turned red in Indonesia last week.

Red skies in Indonesia. Credit: Reuters

Hey did the sky turned red in Indonesia last week? Is the world ending??

Yes to the first part, and very definitely no to the next. Calm down.

Then why was the sky red in the village of Jambi??

The sky turned red because of hundreds of acres of forestland were burning. It was quite horrific. Indonesia's meteorology, climatology and geophysics agency (BMKG) said that the reddish hue in the sky was because of a phenomenon known as "Mie Scattering." The red colour occurs because the sunlight was being scattered in the air by micro-particles of pollutants that were kicked up from the burning.

Gosh that's terrible! Why was it so bad this year?

Well though forest fires have become an annual occurrence, this year was particularly bad because of a long drought, slash and burn techniques and El Nino-like conditions.

Whoa! Back up! Slash and burn? El Nino? What is all this mumbo-jumbo?

Slash and burn is a method of clearing land for farming where farmers cut down vegetation and burn some to quickly clear large tracts of land, though the fires can quickly go out of control.

El Nino is a climate pattern that happens when sea surface temperatures in the tropical oceans are above normal levels for long periods of time. This can cause unusual wind patterns. Together they can, and did, wreak a good deal of havoc.

Hmm. Actually a red sky could be quite cool.

Not for those living under it. Photos and videos show houses covered by a thick smoky haze and people found it difficult to breathe at the time. The whole thing also caused flights to get cancelled and schools and colleges were closed.

Not good at all. But it would make a pretty fantastic sci-fi movie setting!

Well perhaps. Sadly, it is not fiction but very very real. Another fallout of climate change and the harm we are doing to the environment. So let's just try and keep the skies blue on Earth and leave the red ones for the planet Mars.

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