

禍不單行

huo4 bu4 dan1 xing2

A fire broke out at a luxury flat on Robinson Road, Mid-Levels, believed to be caused by a dehumidifier short circuiting.

As the fire was still burning, a second fire started in a lower floor unit of the same building, probably caused by burning debris that was blown into the flat through a window. Hundreds of residents were roused from their sleep and evacuated from the 28-story building. The blaze was put out shortly and no one was hurt.

Having one fire in the building was bad enough, but having two at the same time was really rotten luck. We call this “禍不單行” (*huo4 bu4 dan1 xing2*).

“禍” (*huo4*) is “disasters,” “calamities,” “不” (*bu4*) “not,” “單” (*dan1*) “single,” “singly,” “alone” and “行” (*xing2*) “to walk.” Literally, “禍不單行” is “disasters not singly walk.” It means “misfortunes never come singly.”

Idiom by Lon Yan

An English expression with a similar meaning is “It never rains, but it pours,” which means events, especially unfortunate ones, come together or occur in rapid succession.

“禍不單行” is part of a longer saying: “福無雙至，禍不單行” (*fu2 wu2 shuang1 zhi4*) (*huo4 bu4 dan1 xing2*), which means “good fortune does not come in pairs, and disasters do not come alone.”

Another Chinese expression that vividly describes the predicament of having a bad situation aggravated by another is “屋漏偏逢連夜雨” (*wu1 lou4 pian1 feng2 lian2 ye4 yu3*) – the roof is leaking and it has been raining night after night!

Terms containing the character “單” (*dan1*) include:

單位 (*dan1 wei4*) – a unit

單純 (*dan1 chun2*) – pure, innocent

單身 (*dan1 shen1*) – without spouse

單方面 (*dan1 fang1 mian4*) – unilateral, one sided