

## **Haze shows Asean's paralysis and Najib's sluggishness?**

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MP SPEAKS Let's try a reality check. Malaysians have been hit by haze every year. The cause of the thick smog, which blankets our skyline, has been the same peat forest fires in Sumatra. And these were always brought about by slash and burn activities, which Indonesian, Singaporean and Malaysian companies indulge upon, not to mention smallholders.

And each year, we suffer from upper-respiratory problems, burning or itchy skin and watery eyes. Hospitals and clinics see an upsurge of such cases, including asthma and lung infections.

Environmental groups and opposition politicians have, year after year, demanded that Asean countries grow the political will to hammer out a durable solution.

Fast-forward to now and we can't see beyond two cars ahead on the road because the haze is back like clockwork. The crucial thing missing, however, is any workable solution from any Asean government. Our government has a score that reads 'Epic Fail'.

haze kuala lumpur kl 230613In fact this is the worst choking smog in 16 years. Schools and colleges are shut and the federal government has declared an emergency in three areas.

Despite this, Indonesia has yet to ratify the Asean Agreement on Trans-boundary Haze Pollution, signaling the republic's reluctance to take action against errant companies. The anti-haze treaty came into force in 2003.

Asean nations, Malaysia included, do not keep up enough pressure to lobby Indonesia to ink the agreement. It's the Big Boys Club where member countries might be upset and have diplomatic rows now and then. Days later, they become pals again until the same issue chokes up the friendship.

Without Indonesia signing the agreement, there is no point in having the yearly meeting. It's time that Indonesia shoulders the legal obligation.

And even if it does, the treaty can still be a worthless piece of paper as Asean countries are adamant about their non-interference policy.

So let's not take chances here.

We do not need to leave it to Indonesia alone to monitor, regulate or prosecute errant companies. Malaysia can keep a close watch on Malaysian companies in Sumatra and charge those that flout laws, for these companies have committed nothing less than a crime against humanity.

Millions of people have experienced breathing difficulties and other serious health complications. Many parts of Malaysia are recording unhealthy or hazardous levels. The state constituency of Port Klang (located in the parliamentary constituency of Klang) recorded a hazardous level with an Air Pollution Index (API) of 427 last night.

Experts say this could worsen as wind directions are blowing the haze further into the Klang Valley and up north, possibly affecting Perak, Penang and other northern states.

Educating the rakyat about haze dangers

While the Malaysian government has been asking people to stay indoors, it has not taken any initiative to educate the rakyat about the dangers of the haze.

surgical maskThe haze consists of tiny particles measuring 2.5 microns in diameter or smaller. For example, they are 1/10,000 of an inch in size or 30 times smaller than the width of one hair strand.

These particles are therefore small enough to get past our defensive nose hairs and into our lungs. They can cause the cells in the lungs to mutate and become cancerous. And these tiny particles can also pass from our lungs into our blood stream and be carried throughout our bodies.

In short, particles in haze can increase our risk of developing bacterial and viral infections, cancer, stroke, or heart and lung diseases. And yet, Prime Minister Najib Razak's government does not see it necessary to create public awareness so that everyone understands what he or she can do to minimise any health complications.

For example, we see most Malaysians walking around with surgical masks that would not help to keep off the tiny particles. It is the responsibility of the government to educate the people to wear N95 masks as well as cap the price to make it affordable.

On top of that, the Health Ministry should already have started distributing these

masks so that the poor have access to them as well.

Therefore, while we are busy pointing fingers at Indonesia, the fact that Najib's administration has not done any of this is beyond the pale. Not to mention that Malaysia, as part of Asean, prefers looking pretty at the dinner table with Indonesia as opposed to doing the right thing by the people.

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