

Haze clouding Indonesia-Singapore diplomatic ties
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On Thursday, Singapore's Foreign Minister K Shanmugam said he was "shocked" by the statement by Indonesian Vice-President Jusuf Kalla.

Jusuf that day said Indonesia will not apologise for the haze, given that its neighbours never thanked the republic for the fresh air that comes from Indonesia's forests when there is no fire.

Singapore stands ready to assist Indonesia and has already enacted legislation to prosecute Singaporean firms found contributing to the haze, Shanmugam in a Facebook statement said.

"Yet at the same time, we are hearing some shocking statements made, at senior levels, from Indonesia, with a complete disregard for our people, and their own – PSI levels in parts of Indonesia are at almost 2,000 (PSI above 350 is considered hazardous in Indonesia).

"How is it possible for senior people in government to issue such statements, without any regard for their people, or ours, and without any embarrassment, or sense of responsibility?" he asked.

Are they thankful?

Jusuf at a dialogue with Indonesians in New York said Indonesia's only obligation is to curb forest fire, and it is already doing so.

It has also imposed a ban on logging and a moratorium of conversion of peatlands for agricultural purposes, he said.

"How many months have they (the neighbouring countries) enjoyed fresh air from the forests when it is not on fire? Months. Are they thankful?

"But when there is a forest fire, and it is usually only for a month the smog also goes to their districts. So, why should we apologise?" he was quoted by Indonesian daily Kompas as saying.

Jusuf also blamed foreign investors who worked hand in glove with local owners to destroy the forest.

"They taught us to destroy our forests. As a result, forest is cleared for development. Our peatlands were opened up. The peatlands are now dry and susceptible to fire," he reportedly said.

Malaysia-Indonesia ties remain cordial amid the crisis, which has forced school closure in five states, as air quality plunge to unhealthy levels.

During his visit to Jakarta earlier this month, Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said Malaysia and Indonesia has strong ties which helps resolve problems between the two nations.

"Informal relations can help resolve many problems which sometimes could not be settled formally. When the border issue cropped up such as in Ambalat previously, continuity (informal relations) had eased the tension," he was quoted by Bernama as saying.

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