

Indonesia asks four countries for help to fight fires

MalaysiaKini.com

Oct 8th, 2015

Gayatri Suroyo, Reuters

Indonesia's president said today he had asked Singapore, Russia, Malaysia and Japan for help to put out fires that have sent choking smoke drifting across the region for weeks.

Indonesia had repeatedly declined offers of help from overseas to tackle the smoke, the main cause of which is companies using fire to clear land for palm oil and pulp wood plantations on Sumatra island and its part of Borneo island.

"We have asked for help and we have received help from Singapore," Joko Widodo said in a statement released on the cabinet secretary's website, adding he also wanted help from Russia, Malaysia and Japan.

"We hope this will speed up the process because fires on peat land is different from regular forest fires," he said.

He did not say what help had come from Singapore but said he was seeking at least three aircraft from Singapore and Russia.

"What we need now are planes that can carry 12-15 tonnes of water, not like the 2-3 tonnes we have now," Joko (photo) said.

The fires are set to clear vegetation but often smoulder for weeks in underground peat deposits.

The smoke has pushed up pollution to dangerous levels across parts of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and southern Thailand, disrupted flights and closed schools on bad days.

Tourism operators are fretting and health authorities across the region warn people to avoid exercise when the smoke is heavy.

Indonesia routinely brushes off complaints while vowing to act to stop the burning but year after year, the problem reappears in the dry season.

It has been exacerbated this year by the El Nino weather phenomenon which has brought unusually dry conditions.

Joko did not elaborate on why Indonesia had now decided to seek foreign help. It had faced criticism for turning down offers from Singapore.

Indonesia's foreign minister, Retno Marsudi, is expected to meet her Malaysian counterpart tomorrow to discuss cooperation on the problem.

Indonesia's national disaster management agency said last week it was hoping for rain to help douse the fires by early November, when the northeast monsoon usually starts.

- Reuters

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd

Source: <http://www.malysiakini.com/news/315038>