

Indonesia warns forest fires could last another month

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Forest and plantation fires that have raged on Indonesia's Sumatra and Borneo islands for more than three months could last until the end of November, a disaster management official said today.

Land and aerial fire-fighting teams have failed to extinguish the fires that have blanketed parts of South-East Asia in choking smog.

"Our prediction is that rain will start in November, though in the scale is limited because of El Nino," said Sutopo Nugroho, a spokesperson for the National Disaster Management Agency.

"We expect the fires to be fully extinguished by the end of November," he said.

Fire-fighting teams sent from Malaysia and Australia ended their two-week assistance mission this week, leaving Singapore the only foreign country helping to put out the blazes, Sutopo said.

Indonesia is considering renting water-bombing aircraft from Russia, Canada and Australia, with some of the cost shouldered by plantation and timber companies thought to have contributed to the fires, he said.

Haze generated from the fires has reached hazardous levels, disrupting flights and causing more than 100,000 affected residents on Sumatra and Borneo to suffer from respiratory infections.

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