

Work to reduce haze starts
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After years of talking, real work to address the annual problem of haze from illegal fires in Indonesia has begun, a Malaysian minister was on Monday quoted as saying.

Malaysia and Singapore are advising Indonesian farmers on alternatives to burning trees to clear land, Natural Resources and Environment Minister Azmi Khalid told The Star newspaper.

Every year, Indonesian farmers burn forests and shrubland to clear land for agriculture, causing a haze that spreads across Southeast Asia during the dry season, affecting tourism and health in the region.

"Finally, all the talking has ended and the real work is being carried out," said Azmi after returning from an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) meeting in Brunei on the problem.

Azmi said Singapore had sent experts to Indonesia's Jambi province to teach locals about land management

Jambi is on Sumatra island which, along with Indonesian Borneo, are prime sources of the haze.

Azmi said Asean aimed to raise 500,000 dollars to fund measures to control the haze and Indonesia had already set aside 60 million dollars.

The haze hit its worst level in 1997-98 and cost the Southeast Asian region an estimated nine billion dollars by disrupting air travel and other business activities.

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