

Indonesia is not afraid of Malaysia or Singapore, says its president
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There is a new haze being generated by Indonesia – on whether it's sorry.

First Indonesian ministers talked tough to Malaysia and Singapore, the two countries most hurt by the haze, with the harshest words aimed at their smallest neighbour.

One minister said there would be no apology to then hard-hit Singapore and another even called Singapore "childish".

Then in a surprise turn of events, the President of Indonesia Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono apologised to Malaysia and Singapore, which went down well with his neighbours, but in his own country, not so much.

The latest, tough words again. This time from the President himself, quoted in the Jakarta Post headline yesterday, "Indonesia is not afraid of Malaysia or Singapore."

All in the space of seven days.

Yudhoyono told the media in a press conference yesterday that he monitored social media after he apologised to the Malaysian and Singaporean governments and noticed that people thought Indonesia was afraid of its neighbours.

The influential national daily quoted his response to this: "There is no any sovereign state that should be afraid of other countries."

It was quite a different tone when Yudhoyono apologised to the neighbours on Monday evening, when he said: "For what has happened, as President, I say sorry and seek the understanding of our relatives in Singapore and Malaysia.

"Indonesia had no intention to cause this. And we will continue to bear responsibility to overcome what has happened."

That sparked an uproar in the media with Republika daily saying he had "hurt the people", and another, Media Indonesia, saying he had "dragged down national pride".

Politicians and the public decried the Indonesian head's apology as submissive.

The president's Monday apology followed strong words from his Foreign Affairs Minister Marty Natalegawa on Friday, who insisted Indonesia will not apologise to Singapore. The minister was quoted on Friday by kompass.com, "The Singaporean government must be aware that we have done all we can to tackle this haze problem. Indonesia has been dealing with this for years and improvements have been made."

The Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Agung Lakson even called Singapore childish for its anxiety over the haze.

"Singapore shouldn't be like children, in such a tizzy," he told a press conference last Thursday.

Yesterday the President also warned off his own countrymen to keep the haze issue separate from other homeland territorial issues.

Noting that some tried to connect the problem of haze to an issue over Ambalat territory, he said the government would keep struggling to defend the territory.

"I am telling you firmly that in terms of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and other national interests, there has never been a compromise," said Yudhoyono.

He was speaking at a press conference at Halim Perdanakusuma airport in East Jakarta. Yudhoyono also said that his government would defend the rights of migrant Indonesian workers in Malaysia through diplomatic channels. – June 27, 2013.

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