

Indonesia Needs Three Years To Solve Haze Problem

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JAKARTA, Sept 30 (Bernama) -- Indonesia requires three years to address the issue of burning of fields and forests in the country, and solve the haze problem in neighbouring countries.

President Joko Widodo said the problem of forest fires could not possibly be solved in a short time, and the three-year time period was set to see the progress of the work done to overcome it.

He said this during an interview aired on BBC Indonesia, as quoted by local online news portals here, today.

He said Indonesia had done its best to address the problem which affected its neighboring countries, especially Malaysia and Singapore.

The Indonesian president, who is better known as Jokowi, said among the current initiatives being taken was to deploy 3,700 soldiers and 8,000 police personnel along with four water bombers, to fight the fire.

Jokowi said the government would also take immediate action by building canals in farmlands, so the land always remained moist and not easily combustible.

He said in terms of enforcement, the authorities had arrested a number of individuals and business owners believed to be burning forests and fields for replanting purposes.

Fires in forests and agricultural areas have now raged in several provinces in Indonesia, namely in Riau, South Sumatra, Jambi, West Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, South Kalimantan and East Kalimantan.

The massive burning of forests and agricultural land is believed to be carried out by certain parties as an easy way to open up new agricultural land, and Malaysian and Singaporean investment companies are often ostensibly linked to the activity.

The Association of Plantation Investors of Malaysia in Indonesia (APIMI), however, denied the allegations and confirmed that none of the Malaysian plantation companies operating in Indonesia were involved in the burning of fields and forests.

APIMI's chief representative Nor Hazlan Abdul Mutalib said on the contrary, all plantations owned by Malaysians ensured that they complied with the practice of clearing the fields without burning.

He said the practice of burning forests and fields for any purpose was an offence in the

country, and all members of APIMI always complied with the laws of agricultural operations.

He said that if there were cases of open burning in plantations owned by Malaysians, it was actually the work of local people who lived in the area.

"This is because there are squatters in the plantation areas owned by foreign investment companies in the country, and the Indonesian government itself requires the provision of 20 per cent of the estate to these residents," he said.

Meanwhile, according to the website of the Indonesian Agency of Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics (BMKG), the haze situation in Palangkaraya, the capital of West Kalimantan, hit very dangerous levels today morning when the Air Pollutant Index (API) in the city reached 1,000, however it began coming down to the very unhealthy level in the afternoon.

In Pontianak, the haze was still at a very unhealthy API level of between 250-300, while in Palembang, the readings this morning reached very dangerous levels when they hit 900, but in the afternoon, the level reduced to within the 250-300 range.

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