

## Govt wants haze agreement ratified

Indonesia, the 2011 ASEAN chair and the only country in the region that has not endorsed the haze agreement, has set a target to ratify the ASEAN haze pollution agreement this year. Senior officials, including from the Foreign Affairs, Environment and Forestry Ministries, had intensified talks and targeted to ratify the agreement before Indonesia hosts the ASEAN summit this year. The government had previously tried to seek House of Representatives approval to ratify the haze agreement, but the House rejected the proposal in 2008.

“We will try again,” Environment Ministry deputy minister for environmental damage control Arief Yuwono told reporters after the meeting held at the Foreign Ministry office on Friday. Arief said the ratification was essential to help strengthen institutional coordination in Indonesia for dealing with prevention of forest fires.

“The cooperation with other ASEAN countries is important, including in forest fires and emergency situations facing the land,” he said. “For us, it would of course be comfortable to mobilize aid [from ASEAN countries] if there is a formal agreement.”

While refusing to approve the ratification in 2008, legislators argued that the draft bill should include illegal logging issues in efforts to reduce the exports of illicit wood, including to ASEAN countries. Indonesia is the only country in ASEAN that has not ratified the agreement after the Philippines endorsed it last year.

Ten ASEAN countries adopted the trans-boundary haze agreement in 2002 obliging signatory countries to take proactive steps to stop haze pollution from land and forest fires within their territories through strict regulations, heat-seeking satellites and training for firefighters.

The delegation from Indonesia had so far acted as observers in the annual trans-boundary meeting to discuss land and forest fire prevention. Indonesia will host a ministerial steering committee on trans-boundary haze this year with the first senior officials meeting to be held in March.

Legislator Satya W. Yudha hailed the government plan to ratify trans-boundary haze, but warned the motive should not only be because Jakarta would host the ASEAN summit.

“It is good. We will support it,” he told The Jakarta Post on Friday. Satya warned the government that the ASEAN countries should respect Indonesian sovereignty with the control of aid coming to Jakarta under the hand of the Indonesian government.

“We hope ASEAN countries that have already ratified the trans-boundary haze would also stop dumping hazardous waste into Indonesian water,” he said.

Indonesia is the largest forest nation in the region with 120 million hectares of rainforest. Forest fires have long been an annual event in Indonesia during the dry season, and have several times shifted haze pollution to Singapore and Malaysia. The governments of Singapore and Malaysia protested the Indonesian administration over the haze pollution blanketing parts of the two countries last year. Indonesia has signed bilateral deals with Singapore and Malaysia, with the two countries promising to help Indonesia stop land and forest fires.

The government promised to cut the number of hotspots by 20 percent per year to meet Indonesia’s pledge to reduce its emissions by 26 percent by 2020.