

## *Forest fire haze again forces closure of Riau's airport*

Pinang Kampai Airport in Dumai, Riau, was closed on Monday after visibility was severely limited by nearby forest fires driven by high temperatures.

Airport operations manager Sayed Yoesman Syahputra said flight service was suspended for four hours after visibility was limited to 500 meters.

A Pelita Air Fokker 100 plane carrying PT Chevron Pacific Indonesia employees that was scheduled to land at around 9 a.m. local time was diverted to Sultan Syarif Kasim II Airport in Pekanbaru.

"This is the second closure this year. On Friday the airport was also closed temporarily due to haze and was reopened at noon after the haze faded," he said.

Sayed attributed the thick haze in the morning to light winds. "The haze has gathered over the airport. The haze and clouds can only shift when wind velocity is greater than 10 knots," he said.

The haze blanketing the airport resulted from fires over the last week in the nearby forests and several oil palm plantations in Medang Kampai and West Dumai districts.

Dumai Police spokesman Adj. Comr. Suwarji said more than 50 hectares had been afflicted by fires.

"The fires have been put out at a number of locations, but they still emit smoke," he said.

"The fire was sparked by humans. We are still questioning several residents near the fire sites," Suwarji said.

According to the Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysical Agency's (BMKG) Pekanbaru office, the haze covered almost all of Riau on Monday morning.

Meteorologist Sanya Gautani said there were 39 fire hot spots in 11 of the 12 regencies and mayoralities in Riau.

"Only Pekanbaru is free of hot spots, but residents were also affected by haze in the morning," Sanya said.

High temperatures led the BMKG to issued a forest and peatland fire alert, Sanya said.