

## **63 detained over forest fires, illegal logging**

Since its establishment on April 5 this year, the Illegal Loggers and Arsonists Hunting Team has arrested 63 suspects, a police official said on Monday.

Riau Police spokesman Adj. Sr. Comr. Guntur Aryo Tejo said the team had arrested the suspects red-handed, based on 42 reports from police precincts across the province.

“Seventeen reports were related to forest and land fires while the remainder were related to illegal logging,” Guntur said.

He revealed that many of the suspects were arrested while clearing land by burning it. Meanwhile, the Jambi administration called on residents to prevent forest and peatland fires ahead of the upcoming dry season, asking them not to burn when clearing their land.

“Ninety percent of the fires are caused by human activities and the rest are by nature, such as the prolonged dry season,” Jambi deputy governor Fachrori Umar said on Monday.

Fachrori also asked private plantation companies to cooperate with residents and local governments to avoid activities that could trigger fires.

“We will not tolerate the use of burning in land clearance,” he added.

Meanwhile, the Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency’s (BMKG) Pekanbaru meteorology station warned the public of possible forest and land fires which could happen during August and September in Riau province due to the prolonged dry season.

“We predict the peak of the dry season will occur from August to September this year,” the station head Slamet Riyadi said as quoted by Antara on Monday.

He forecast that during that time, the wind would blow from the southwest to northwest and north, with the haze passing Dumai city, Riau and possibly reaching Singapore and Malaysia.

According to the data from the National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB), the last forest and land fires in February this year destroyed 2,398 hectares, including in Giam Siak Kecil conservation forest.

Haze from the UNESCO-declared conservation forest blanketed Pekanbaru, the capital city of Riau, including its Sultan Syarif Kasim II International Airport.

“In February and March this year, Pekanbaru was blanketed by haze originating from forest fires in Giam Siak Kecil,” Riyadi said. “But this time, the haze will not pass through Pekanbaru but will affect Dumai and probably reach neighboring countries,” he added.