

## **New Riau govt told to tackle haze**

As the number of hotspots increases, Home Minister Gamawan Fauzi instructed the new administration of Riau province on Wednesday to immediately seek a solution to resolve the annual forest and peatland fires.

“Huge losses have occurred due to the haze in Riau, including in the economic sector,” Gamawan said in a speech after swearing in Annas Maamun and Arsyadjuliandi “Andi” Rachman as governor and deputy governor of Riau for 2014-2019.

“As a result of limited visibility, planes can only land at the Pekanbaru airport after 10 a.m. and important people and entrepreneurs who had scheduled visits to Riau have had to postpone or cancel their appointments,” said Gamawan.

According to Gamawan, it was no longer appropriate to refer to the haze as a disaster because it occurred on an annual basis.

“This is work for us to do and it should be addressed comprehensively. Don’t let the problem recur every year and cause rows with neighboring countries,” he said.

According to Gamawan, Riau should establish a concept to raise awareness among every element of society on how to respond to the fires.

“Every societal component should be empowered, and if need be form a permanent volunteer team up to the village level so that even a small fire can be immediately doused,” he added.

The number of forest, plantation and peatland fires in Riau reached 256 on Wednesday morning, more than double Tuesday’s 126.

The data was based on recordings on Wednesday at 7 a.m. local time, he added, according to Antara.

Of the 256 hotspots in Riau, 94 were in Bengkalis regency, 32 in Meranti, 26 in Indragiri Hilir, 34 in Pelalawan, 52 in Siak, 10 in Rokan Hilir, seven in Dumai and one in Kampar.

The head of the Pekanbaru Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency’s (BMKG) data and information section, Slamet Riyadi, predicted that the number of hotspots in Riau would remain high in the week to come because of a lack of rain.

“Haze usually occurs in May or June. But this year, the haze started appearing in January and February in Riau and West Kalimantan,” National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) spokesman Sutopo said in Jakarta recently.

Riau borders Malaysia and Singapore. Singaporean Environment and Water Minister Vivian Balakrishnan has expressed concern over the possible impact of the haze on the city-state due to the increasing number of hotspots.

The haze has also had a serious impact on public health, with more 14,000 people in Riau experiencing respiratory problems due to the haze.