

Companies investigated over forest fires in Riau

The Riau Police are looking for companies or financiers believed to have hired farmers and residents to clear trees by fire.

“We are searching for the financiers,” Riau Police chief Brig. Gen. Condro Kirono told the media at a coordinated meeting at the Riau Haze Disaster Mitigation command post at Roesmin Nurjadin Air Base in Pekanbaru on Monday.

He said the police had also instructed residents, especially those living in areas prone to forest fires, not to clear land by burning.

The measure, added Condro, was expected to raise awareness of the health hazards from haze as a result of forest and peatland fires. The Riau Police earlier named 40 suspects implicated in forest and peatland fires in various regencies and cities across the province.

“They were caught and immediately named suspects over the past few weeks,” said Riau Forest Fire Task Force leader Sr. Comr. Estuning.

Estuning added that the police were investigating 31 forest and peatland fires in a number of regencies and municipalities in Riau.

On Saturday, Coordinating People’s Welfare Minister Agung Laksono said that local and Singaporean companies were responsible for the haze plaguing Sumatra.

Singapore responded to Agung’s statement by demanding to know the names of the Singaporean companies or individuals and the evidence against them. Meanwhile in Jambi, 17 hotspots were detected on Monday, four of them in Batanghari regency, three in West Tanjungjabung, six in East Tanjungjabung and two each in Muarojambi and Tebo.

Jambi Disaster Mitigation Agency (BPBD) emergency response head Dalmanto said his office was engaged in field operations to put out the fires. He added that firefighting was conducted by the Manggala Agni Fire Department, which was coordinating with the regencies and mayoralities.

Dalmanto said the forest fire team was currently operating in five spots, three of which were in East Tanjungjabung and two in Muarojambi. One of the hotspots currently being handled spans around 300 hectares, he added.

In North Sumatra, the dense haze covering Central Tapanuli over the past few weeks has led to the closure of Dr. Ferdinand Lumban Tobing Airport in Pinang Sori. Central Tapanuli BNPB head Bonaparte Manurung said on Monday that the airport had been forced to close on Sunday due to dense haze that could endanger air traffic.

He added that visibility was recorded at between 300 and 400 meters in Central Tapanuli.

Bonaparte said the closure of the airport in Pinang Sori, located 15 kilometers from the Central Tapanuli regency capital Pandan, was the second time after it was first closed on Feb. 19.

A number of arriving and departing flights from Pinang Sori Airport to Kualanamu International Airport in Deli Serdang regency had to be canceled.

Earlier, the Kualanamu Airport Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency (BMKG) announced that the significant number of hotspots had disrupted airport activities.

“As many as 85 hotspots have been recorded in the province. The haze can reduce visibility to 200 to 2,000 meters, so we have issued a warning to pilots because visibility of below 5,000 meters is no longer safe for flights,” said Kualanamu BMKG data and information section head Mega Sirait in Medan on Monday.

