

## **Riau sees yet more hotspots**

A The presence of hotspots indicating spreading forest and peatland fires has caused increased concern in Sumatra. Satellite images on Monday morning detected 570 hotspots in Sumatra, 417 of which are scattered over 11 regencies and cities in Riau.

It was found that the number of hotspots had risen rapidly during the previous two days, from 75 on Saturday to 154 on Sunday, and then to 417 on Monday.

On Monday morning, the highest number of hotspots, amounting to 327, was in Rokan Hilir regency, followed by Bengkalis (27), Rokan Hulu (21), nine each in Pelalawan and Kampar (9), six each in Dumai city and Kuantan, Sengingi (five), Indragiri Hilir (four), Indragiri Hulu (two) and one in Meranti Islands.

As many as 273 of the hotspots are believed to be fires, with a certainty level of 70 percent. Head of data and information at the National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) Agus Wibowo said the dry weather increased the potential for fires.

“The chances of rain are very slight, so every effort must be made to prevent the recurrence of haze. If we fail to respond immediately, the number of hotspots will further rise and people will celebrate Idul Fitri in the middle of a haze,” he said.

He said that to date, the haze in Riau was still tolerable with a drop in visibility taking place in Rengat and Pelalawan, each to only between 4 and 5 kilometers.

“However, we must anticipate the recurrence of thicker haze, especially now when the wind direction has the potential to carry haze over to Malaysia,” Agus said.

The Riau Haze Disaster Response task force is still carrying out fire-fighting efforts by deploying more than 300 military and police personnel, three helicopters for water bombing and weather modification efforts to create rain.

Separately, Riau Governor Annas Maamun urged all the regencies and mayoralities in Riau to take swift measures. “I’ve instructed the Riau BPBD [disaster mitigation agency] to contact regents and mayors whose regions are affected by hotspots to immediately conduct fire-fighting, especially Rokan Hilir which is the worst-hit area,” Annas said.

He said he would immediately go to Rokan Hilir to conduct a coordination meeting with the police, the military, village chiefs, district heads and the regent. Annas denied his administration was halfhearted in taking measures to prevent forest and peatland fires.