

## Haze chokes Batam, will soon reach Singapore



Batam and surrounding areas were covered in haze on Sunday and Monday due to smoke from fire hot spots in a number of provinces in the southern part of Sumatra. The haze has reduced visibility from 10,000 meters to 5,000 meters. The Hang Nadim Airport's office of the Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysical Agency (BMKG), Philip Mustamu, told The Jakarta Post on Tuesday that a number of hot spots had been detected in Jambi, South Sumatra and Lampung on Sunday and Monday.

The hot spots found in the three provinces originated from forest fires, but whether or not they were set intentionally remained unclear. "I have no authority to answer whether the fires were set intentionally, but the hot spots apparently originated from forest fires," Philip said.

He said that 160 hot spots had been detected by radar and the air pollutant concentrations due to haze particles had restricted visibility at Hang Nadim Airport. According to the Batam BMKG, visibility is variable at Hang Nadim Airport due to the haze.

On Sunday, visibility was recorded at between 6,000 and 7,000 meters, then on Monday it dropped to 5,000 meters, while on Tuesday it gradually improved to above 8,000 meters after rain began to fall in a number of locations in Batam.

Visibility is poor for flights when it is measured at between 1,000 to 2,000 meters. During normal conditions, visibility at the airport is up to 10,000 meters.

"Despite that, airport operations continue as normal. Take-off and landings are being carried out regularly, although pilots need to be extra careful," said Philip.

Hang Nadim Airport navigation technical group head Ricard Silitonga confirmed Philip's remarks, saying that despite the drop in visibility, navigation activities operated as usual and there were no delays or flight cancellations for incoming or outgoing flights.

"So far, there has been no disruption in airport activities due to the haze," Ricard said. According to Philip, the haze covering Batam will not disappear during periods of bright sun-shine but should fade with adequate rainfall.

Rain which started falling at 1 p.m. on Tuesday in Batam, is expected to get rid of the haze, especially if it is sufficient to extinguish the hot spots in Sumatra.

"It is raining today, so we hope the haze will disappear by itself, especially if the hot spots have been put out," said Philip.

Whether the haze will reach Singapore and other neighboring countries may be only a matter of wind and time. Singapore was covered in a thick haze in October 2010, however Singapore's port and Singapore's Changi airport still functioned as normal.