

Jokowi pledges fewer forest fires for this year

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JAKARTA - President Joko Widodo has reminded all Indonesian officials on the need to continue to prevent forest and plantation fires, noting that the leaders of Malaysia and Singapore had praised him for the progress made so far.

The Indonesian leader said he had issued a guarantee of fewer forest fires for this year. (2018).

"In 2015, every time I met with the Singapore and Malaysian prime ministers and they complained to me about the haze," the president said at a national coordination meeting at Merdeka Palace on forest and plantation fire mitigation on Tuesday (Feb 6).

Mr Joko said the situation had improved vastly since then with the number of hotspots declining significantly.

He said 2015 saw a total of 21,929 hotspots throughout the year, but the number dropped to 3,915 in 2016 and to 2,567 last year. Mr Joko said he had promised the Malaysian and Singapore leaders that the number could be reduced further this year.

"I have given them my guarantee," he was quoted as saying.

He also reminded those attending the meeting of the warning he issued after the 2015 fires when he said that he would sack the provincial police chief or territorial military chief in charge of an area where forest fires were not handled well.

Harsher law enforcement on errant corporations and individuals, and better fire prevention measures by the government and private sector in recent years have led to the significant decline in the number of hotspots, according to Indonesia's disaster management agency's (BNPB's) spokesman Dr Sutopo Purwo Nugroho. More favourable weather conditions have also helped.

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