

ASEAN Efforts to Deal with Forest Fires and Transboundary Haze

The increasing threat of haze due to forest fires in Indonesia has prompted Malaysia to urge a review of the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution to strengthen regional law enforcement mechanisms. However, this step faces major challenges as ASEAN adheres to the principles of consensus, sovereignty and non-intervention without sanctions or fines for violators. This makes the effectiveness of the rules highly dependent on the voluntariness and cooperation of the Indonesian government, especially in sharing land concession data and local law enforcement.

Although Singapore already has a transboundary haze control law that allows fines and civil indemnification obligations, legal enforcement outside the country's territory remains difficult to carry out without the help of the authorities where the fires occurred. On the other hand, experts consider ASEAN's target to be smog-free by 2030 unrealistic if it is not balanced with early preventive measures, such as restoration and peatland management. Therefore, the full operation of the ASEAN Coordination Centre for Transboundary Haze Pollution Control is crucial to encourage *real-time* satellite monitoring and rapid action on the ground before haze spreads into a regional crisis in Southeast Asia.

Rodrigo Duterte's Defense Team Claims Severe Memory Impairment Ahead of ICC Hearing

The defense team of former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte has filed a document with the International Criminal Court (ICC) stating that the 81-year-old man has significant memory impairment. This condition is considered so severe that Duterte often forgets the name of his lead lawyer, Peter Haynes, and thinks he was alive in 2007 or 2008 and 84 or 85 years old. Defense argues that these mental health issues make it difficult for legal teams to get accurate clues to prepare for defense on three counts of crimes against humanity.

The alleged violations include murders and attempted murders involving at least 76 victims, which fall into three main categories: the killing of 19 people by the *Davao Death Squad* during his tenure as Davao Mayor (2013–2016), the killing of 14 *high-value targets* during his presidency (2016–2017), and the murder of dozens of victims in *barangay clearance operations* from 2016 to 2018. On the other hand, the ICC prosecutor concluded that Duterte is still capable of exercising his legal rights and deserves to be tried. The judge is now weighing the results of a medical examination by three independent experts to determine Duterte's eligibility for the trial scheduled to begin on Nov. 30.

Protests Against Israeli Tourists in Thailand

The Jewish entity's ambassador to Thailand, Alona Fisher-Kamm, appealed that conflicts in the Middle East do not extend to Thailand as a series of protests and

disputes involving 'Israeli' tourists continue. Fisher-Kamm said the wave of demonstrations was not based on antisemitic attitudes, but was triggered by cultural disparities and allegations of disrespectful behavior from a number of tourists who lack respect for local customs. A series of protests by locals and nationalist groups have raised concerns about rampant violations, ranging from impolite behavior in public places, incidents of refusal to pay bills, allegations of using local nominees to illegally own land and businesses, the operation of a school without a permit on Koh Phangan, to a funeral at a Jewish cemetery whose operating permit has expired. To ease tensions, the 'Israeli' Embassy published a guide on holiday etiquette in Hebrew. On the other hand, Thailand's Foreign Minister, Sihasak Phuangketkeow, emphasized that his country's hospitality does not mean that foreign tourists are free to violate local laws and regulations.

Najib Razak Says He Cannot Pay Daytime Pardon Fine for House Arrest

Through his legal team, former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak stated that he could not meet the conditions for the payment of a fine of RM50 million (approximately US\$12.26 million) to obtain a conditional pardon and a commute to house arrest. The lawyer explained that most of his assets, bank accounts and property are still frozen by the government due to the law enforcement process so that his management is beyond his control. The fine terms are part of a reduction in sanctions from his original sentence in July 2020, where he was sentenced to 12 years in jail and fined RM210 million on seven counts, namely three counts of criminal breach of trust, three counts of money laundering, and one count of abuse of power related to the flow of RM42 million in funds from SRC International—a former subsidiary of the state investment fund 1MDB—to his personal account in 2014–2015. The conditional pardon granted by Sultan Ibrahim requires the repayment of the fine so that he can serve the remainder of his sentence at home until August 2028; if it fails to be fulfilled, the pardon is void and he remains in Kajang Prison. Although the UMNO sympathizers' fundraiser managed to raise more than RM1 million, Najib appreciated the support but insisted he did not want to burden the public. On the other hand, the pardon decision sparked political turmoil, including the resignation of Transport Minister Anthony Loke in protest.