HAZE AFFECTS INDONESIA FLIGHTS, WORSENS AIR QUALITY IN SINGAPORE

News / Airlines

Smog from forest fires on Indonesia's Sumatra island is disrupting flights at a number of local airports and fouling air quality as far away as Singapore and Malaysia.

At least six airlines canceled flights Tuesday from Sultan Thaha Airport in Jambi city, after all flights there were canceled Monday, transport ministry spokesman J.A. Barata said. No flights were operating Tuesday morning at Sultan Syarif Kasim II Airport in Riau province.

The haze, caused by farmers who burn forests to clear their land for agriculture, is an annual occurrence that sends smog wafting northward to Singapore and Malaysia. Those governments have complained to Indonesia, and Singaporean legislators last year passed a law allowing regulators to prosecute companies involved in illegal forest burning.

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The smog can send air quality in Singapore and Malaysia into hazardous territory, defined as a reading above 100 on the three-hour Pollutant Standards Index. Tuesday's PSI reading in Singapore was 86, down from 121 Monday evening and far below the record of 401 set in June 2013.

Flights were operating as normal Tuesday from Singapore's Changi and Seletar airports.

Visibility Tuesday morning was as little as 300 meters (984 feet) at Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II airport in Palembang in the southern part of Sumatra, and was 500 meters in Riau. Carriers such as PT Garuda Persero TBK, Sriwijaya Air, Lion Air and Citilink have canceled all flights to and from Jambi, and could maintain the cancellations through Thursday, the transport ministry's Barata said.

The fires are exacerbated by the local dry season. Indonesian authorities warned last week that this year's haze will be worse than in previous years, the Bernama news agency reported, and could last through end-November.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo visited Sumatra on Sunday to survey the government's response to the problem. Malaysia's natural resources minister is due to visit soon to discuss possible solutions with his Indonesian counterpart.

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