

## LOCAL News

### MSC tackles forest fire issues, haze pollution

Rokiah Mahmud



Awg Mahmud, Deputy Director of the Forestry Department, delivering his presentation. - ROKIAH MAHMUD

The Second Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee on Transboundary Haze (MSC) continued for the second day.

During the morning session yesterday, the members delivered their respective country's case studies and findings that related to the conservation, biodiversity and fire prevention.

The topics comprised 'Promoting and Sustaining Dialogues to Enhance Police Action' presented by A/P Simon Tay Chairman of SIIA, presentation by 'Brunei Heart of Borneo and its Importance to the Management of Forest Fires and Haze Pollution' presented by Awg Mahmud bin Hj Yussof, Deputy Director of the Forestry Department, and Peat land in Brunei and 'Its Importance to Haze Management' by Dr Hj H Dulimah binti Hj Jali from Universiti Brunei Darussalam.

Speaking as one of the local presenters, Awg Mahmud said that, based on the Brunei perspective, the peat swamp forest is often among the vulnerable areas attacked by fires. Therefore, it not only will cause regional problems, but will also affect the sub-regional level.

In fact, he added, the haze derived from the emission of smokes from the forest fires will indirectly affect the whole of Borneo, which includes Sabah, Sarawak and Kalimantan.

"This is one of the critical problems that we must face and encounter. According to statistics provided by the Fire and Rescue Department report, a total of 2,000 hectares of forest lands in Brunei Darussalam have been affected by fire and this includes bush fires.

"In 1997, when the El Nino phenomenon hit Brunei, the peat land and mangrove forest areas were the major areas affected by the problems. Not only did the forest turn into dry land but often we see the occurrence of fire," he said.

Awang Mahmud then elaborated on the impact and consequences of the transboundary haze condition, which was due to the low quality of the environment. Hence the occurrence of fire cannot be neglected as the ashes in the air contain dangerous particles that can affect one's health.

Without proper management in tackling forest fires, the problems will weigh heavily on the country's valuable vegetations and lead to the losses of soil fertility and biodiversity.