

## Indonesian President's apology significant, say observers



This handout picture taken on June 23, 2013 and released by Greenpeace on June 25 show smoke blanketing cleared forest land as fires rage in Riau province on Sumatra island.

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INDONESIAN President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's apology to both Singapore and Malaysia for the haze situation is a significant move, said political observers.

Associate Professor Tan See Seng from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies said that the apology "makes for good neighbourly relations".

He added that it serves as a "nice complement" to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's call to "focus on problem-solving rather than engage in megaphone diplomacy".

Dr Lee Poh Onn, a senior fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, said that the apology also "demonstrates that Indonesia is taking positive steps to eradicate the haze problem".

Singapore Management University law professor Eugene Tan said that the apology also represents a "powerful demonstration of political leadership".

On Monday evening, Dr Yudhoyono said in a televised media conference: "For what has happened, as President, I say sorry, and seek the understanding of our brothers in Singapore and Malaysia."

The Straits Times reported that he said Indonesia had "no intention to cause this".

"And we will continue to bear responsibility to overcome what has happened," he added.



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On why Dr Yudhoyono made the apology, Dr Lee said the haze has been continuing for some time now.

"Both the Singapore and Malaysian governments are anxious for the Indonesian government to control open burning," he said.

Dr Lee added that the apology could "put some calm" on exchanges that have been made in the past few days.

**ADRIAN LIM**