

Waste, clean and safe energy focus on 2011 Earth Day

Indonesians observed Earth Day, which falls every April 22, by expressing concerns about the environment – from waste management to clean energy supply. Several Yogjakartans celebrated the day on Friday by enjoying an art performance in the middle of Bedog River in Bantul staged by mime artist Jemek Supardi. Jemek, with dancers and musicians from the Indonesian Arts Institute in the province, held a performance based on water and Dewi Sri, the symbol of fertility and rice. In the center of Yogyakarta, several students from the Social and Political Sciences Faculty at Gadjah Mada University (UGM) staged a rally to raise awareness of emissions reductions. Standing next to the traffic light at the Post Office headquarters near Northern Alun-alun, the students persuaded motorcyclists to turn off their vehicles while waiting for the green light.

They also distributed seedlings to passersby who agreed to plant them. Students of the Forestry Faculty at UGM also commemorated the day by staging a long march from their campus in Sleman to Yogyakarta, while distributing flyers on reducing the use of plastic bags and picking up trash along the way. In Jakarta, environment guru Emil Salim made a speech at the Freedom Institute on Thursday, saying that Indonesia would be better off utilizing different types of natural resources in supporting electrical demand rather than pinning hopes on nuclear power. Emil said that as a country with many islands, Indonesia should not copy the continental countries' method of centralizing energy supply in one place. He said that as a country in the Pacific Ring of Fire, a 40,000 kilometer horseshoe-shaped connection of plate tectonic fault lines where earthquakes and volcanic eruptions regularly occur, it was necessary to ensure that a disturbance on an Indonesian island would not affect other islands. "The problem with nuclear power is that it calls for one source of energy supply. We cannot do that because it will make our islands dependent on each other," the former environmental minister said.

Emil, also the presidential special adviser on the environment, suggested every major island in Indonesia has its own source of energy, such as in Kalimantan with coal-fired power, Sumatra with hydroelectric power, Java with geothermal energy, or East and West Nusa Tenggara with wind power.

"We should not look at how nuclear power will supply the power we need, but we have to take a look at how the system of electricity in Indonesia can be built based on its archipelagic characteristics," he said.

"We have to be selective and apply the technology according to each region's ability," he added. He also said that efficiency and renewable natural resources had to be prioritized in discussions of energy needs in the future. Indonesia's National Nuclear Energy Agency (Batan) insisted on proceeding with plans to build a nuclear power plant. This year, Batan is mapping potential locations to build the power plant. Women also voiced their own concerns on the condition of the Earth. Non-governmental organization on women's rights Solidaritas Perempuan said the government should use Earth Day as a time to reflect on environmental management in Indonesia. Solidaritas criticized the government, saying it still depended on exploitative practices such as mining to develop the country. Solidaritas national executive head Risma Umar said such practices had impoverished many communities, where the women bore a greater burden.

She said women in particular experienced a harder life during a water crisis, for example. In many communities, women are responsible for providing water for the family on a daily basis. (rcf)