

Jakarta worst in nation in environmental quality: Study

The city government is defending its environmental record following a report from the central government that named Jakarta the city with worst environmental conditions in the country.

Environment Minister Gusti Muhammad Hatta said over the weekend that the capital scored the lowest in the environmental quality index compared to other major cities in the country. Gusti said the main indicator of environmental quality was emissions levels, with Jakarta's extremely high.

"The emissions from motorized vehicles, especially when stuck in traffic, are very high. This made Jakarta's environmental quality index lower than other cities," Gusti said, as quoted by Antara news agency.

Gusti also cited deteriorating water and air quality, and diminishing green areas as other indicators.

Ministry data shows that in 2008, Jakarta's environmental quality index was 35.31.

The city government was quick to reject Gusti's statement. Jakarta's Environmental Management Agency (BPLHD) head Peni Susanti said the ministry was not fair in its assessment.

"Jakarta's environmental quality index is low because we failed to meet some requirements during the appraisal process," Peni told The Jakarta Post.

Jakarta may have failed to meet the standard, but it has made efforts to compensate for environmental degradation.

"Some of the indicators were things like green areas. Jakarta indeed lacks green areas and open areas, but we do have some mangrove forest that wasn't included in the scoring process," she said.

Peni also said that the city has made progress in improving air quality, including by implementing car-free days twice a month, requiring regular emissions tests and by using environmentally friendly fuel for TransJakarta buses.

Peni said the improvements in air quality had been recognized by the international community, including the Clean Air Initiative (CAI), which gave Jakarta a score of 61.9 for its air quality. That score landed Jakarta in the "good" category, as cities were good with scores between 61 and 80.

For the survey, the CAI analyzed the air quality of eight cities in seven Asian countries: Bangkok in Thailand, Manila in the Philippines, Colombo in Sri Lanka, Jinan and Hangzhou in China, Kathmandu in Nepal and Hanoi in Vietnam.

Jakarta shared the "good" category with Bangkok, Hanoi, Jinan and Manila.

Hangzhou, Kathmandu and Colombo were ranked in the "moderate" category for air quality with scores between 41 and 60. Peni, however, agreed that Jakarta needed to do more, especially with green areas.

The city has set a target of 34.51 percent green areas by 2030 — an increase from the previous target of 13 percent.

Currently, only 9.8 percent of the city's total area of 661 square kilometers is green.

Between 2007 and 2010, the administration acquired 16.7 hectares of land and converted it into green space.

The administration's most recent attempt to increase green space in the city was to convert 27 gas stations into public parks. The city was able to create 2.8 hectares of green space through the program.

Jakarta Governor Fauzi Bowo said that the city would focus on building "interactive" parks in five municipalities and a 4.11 hectare city forest in Kebon Pisang in North Jakarta.