

Adipura scandal a slap in the face for Indonesia

Amid a growing global awareness of sophisticated and far-reaching environmental challenges — such as carbon footprints and climate irregularities — the Adipura award scandal (The Jakarta Post, Jan. 14, 2011) is really a big slap in the face for this country. The high-profile pledge of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to reduce Indonesia's carbon emissions by 26 percent by 2020 suddenly seems absurd in the light of recent revelations of bribery linked to the most celebrated environmental award. This is truly an embarrassment, since it grossly violates the fundamental ethics of care for the environment. It was reported that the Corruption Eradication Commissions (KPK) conducted an investigation seeking evidence of alleged graft at the Environment Ministry linked to the 2010 Adipura Cleanliness Award for Bekasi, one of filthiest cities in Indonesia. The mayor of Bekasi was detained for allegedly bribing officials at the ministry to gain the award. Anyway, the Bekasi Adipura Award is by no means a unique case, since environmental activists said the award often goes to dirty and heavily polluted cities (the Post, Jan. 14, 2011).

Launched in 1984, the Adipura Cleanliness Award was once regarded as a prestigious award given to local administrations committed to keeping the environment clean. As times went by, however, the award has been losing its allure. The culprit, in this case, was the regional autonomy which has pressured local government officials to seek awards signifying their achievements. And the Adipura Award is one such awards and at the same time a political commodity to win the hearts and minds of voters and support from the central government. The Adipura award, which was meant to honor the best environmental programs of Indonesian cities, has been twisted to become just a tradable symbol. This scandal should not be taken lightly, as it betrays the true spirit of sustainable development.

During the era of Prof. Emil Salim's leadership at the Environment Ministry, Indonesia enjoyed a global reputation in mainstreaming environmental considerations in development. As a consequence, several of Indonesia's environmental initiatives then become international references. The Adipura Award was, for example, launched three years ahead of the publication of the United Nations' report *Our Common Future* (1987) — which is globally regarded as the birth source of the sustainable development model. In other words, the Adipura initiative was born before the adoption of sustainable development as a new paradigm in environmental policy worldwide. So, contaminating these awards with corruptive minds is a big setback for this country's environmental reputation.

Environmental protection in Indonesia is, in fact, now at a crossroads; one path heading toward genuine actions, and one going toward green-washing and cosmetic quick-fixes. The cosmetic approaches will only result in gimmick compliance. In this case, gimmick means a trick used for publicity purposes. Instead of contributing toward environmental betterment, a gimmick of environmental compliance is used solely to boost the political reputation of regional chiefs. The creation of the Adipura Awards was, in fact, a promotion of environmental citizenship. Along with the increase in environmental thinking, the definition of citizenship has improved. Environmental apprehension has significantly changed people's understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Environmental responsibilities are reflected in the way citizens care for their environment — as the core element. In this context, the Adipura Awards were intended to rate how much citizens' care for their environment.

When we let bribery sneak into the realm of environmental responsibilities, we tolerate a new breed of environmental non-compliance, namely corruptive environmentalism. However, this does not belong in any of the three factors of environmental non-compliance forwarded by K. Hawkins (1984) in his book *Enforcement and Environment*, i.e. "amoral calculators" — stemming from economic calculations of cost and benefits; "political citizens" — a principled disagreement with regulations regarded as arbitrary or unreasonable; or "organizational incompetence" — failures of management, knowledge and systems. Letting this country get trapped in this corruptive deed will destroy the true environmentalism. In the long run, falsified environmental compliance will cost this country severely, in terms of environmental destruction. This is, probably, the real root of Indonesia's ever-increasing environmental calamity — despite of the mountainous piles of environmental awards and assessment reports.

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