

Illegal logging blamed for North Sumatra flooding

Uncontrolled illegal logging has been blamed for the flash floods in Pematang Siantar and Tapanuli Tengah, North Sumatra that have caused thousands of residents to flee their homes, some of which were submerged by floodwater 5 meters high.

Tapanuli Tengah Regent Raja Bonaran Situmeang said heavy downpours had caused the Sipan Sipahoras dam to overflow.

Situmeang said the Sipan Sipahoras dam could not accommodate any more rainwater because the forests alongside the dam had been destroyed.

“This disaster was solely caused by illegal logging. The forests have been destroyed so there are no longer any trees to absorb rainwater,” Situmeang told The Jakarta Post on Wednesday.

He admitted that illegal logging had been rampant in Tapanuli Tengah, adding that he was cooperating with police to tackle this problem. Situmeang confirmed the police had arrested several suspects, believed to be backed up by top businessmen.

“Illegal logging and land clearing have claimed thousands of hectares of forest land in Tapanuli Tengah, which is now prone to flooding,” said Bonaran, adding that he planned to plant 50,000 trees in October to try to restore the forests in the region.

Illegal logging has become increasingly widespread in North Sumatra and other parts of Sumatra island, following increasing demands for wood from the construction industry.

Meanwhile, Reinward Simanjuntak, head of Pematang Siantar’s Disaster Mitigation Agency, said the flooding there, which had been caused by the Bah Bolon River overflowing with water levels reaching 3 meters high, had affected seven subdistricts and inundated 158 houses situated along the river.

Reinward said that besides illegal logging, the floods were caused by the converting of tea plantations into oil palm plantations, which had reduced the water catchment area.

No casualties were reported due to the floods, he confirmed.

As of Wednesday 12 p.m., he added, residents were apprehensive about returning to their homes as they were still inundated by water.

“They are staying in safer places. Most of them have chosen to stay with relatives, while the rest are staying in tents, which have been provided for the flood victims,” he said.

Copenhageners can look forward to monthly savings on their electricity and heating bills of the equivalent of US\$50-75. And in a time of economic crisis, it should be mentioned that the investments are creating jobs — and that the new solutions will create the foundation for a strong green sector.

Some years ago, everybody talked about sharing knowledge. And it is true that cities all over the world can and should learn from each other. But we must be more ambitious than that; we should transfer actual solutions from one city to another. There is no need to reinvent the wheel in every city.

Copenhagen has gained knowledge and ideas from a range of other capitals, including London, Hamburg and Amsterdam. The Copenhagen approach has been to go beyond products and describe the solutions. Rather than focusing on technology — pipes, pumps, wires, software etc. — the focus has been on the combination of political vision, technology, organization and knowledge.

Just as Copenhagen has benefited from initiatives in other major cities, it is now our ambition that the solutions we develop and test in Copenhagen will benefit many cities around the world that are seeking solutions to how energy consumption and CO2 emissions can be reduced, and the environment improved. It is a fact that the world's cities account for 80 percent of global CO2 emissions.

Other places than Copenhagen has also started going more Green. And in some places, Danida, the Danish Development Assistance, has helped this to happen. In Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, one example of these activities is the green building initiatives.

This is part of the Danish Environmental Support Program for Indonesia, and we hope that through programs like this, Indonesia can also find a way to develop its green economy.

In the final analysis, the transition to a green economy will only succeed if it is commercially sustainable. Going green must pay off. That is a basic idea behind Copenhagen's ambitious project. But also on a global scale we believe that the industrial transition to a green economy has the potential to create new growth engines and spur global economic growth.

Faced with this challenge, the Danish government, in cooperation with the governments of Mexico and the Republic of Korea, has launched a major international initiative called Global Green Growth Forum (3GF). The aim of the Forum is to facilitate and accelerate the global transition to a green economy — the next industrial revolution — by bridging the gap between policy, capital, business and technology. 3GF offers a unique space to spur creative public-private solution-oriented thinking and action in key areas for green growth such as energy, water, finance, trade, biomass, cities and green public procurement.

As public and private sector partners intersect in their varied interests in green growth, new opportunities and ways of collaborating are emerging.

The potential benefits are legion. If we find the right buttons to press in bringing business and governments together to identify not only the barriers but also the solutions, a renewed impulse in the green transition could result.

We have a shared responsibility to ensure a global green transition. Political leaders, municipalities and corporations share the task of creating the new smart growth strategy which will ensure that jobs and growth can go hand in hand with green development.

Frank Jensen is Lord Mayor of Copenhagen, Denmark and Pia Olsen Dyrh is the Minister for Trade and Investment in Denmark.