

5 die in Jakarta, Manado floods

The bad weather has taken a deadly toll with at least five people reported dead in Jakarta and North Sulawesi in the past days after incessant rain hit both areas. The Jakarta Disaster Mitigation Agency (BPBD) reported on Wednesday that four residents, including a 5-year-old girl, had died due to various causes relating to flooding in capital.

“Two of the victims suffered from illnesses, while one person drowned in floodwater. The girl died after she fell into a waterway,” the agency’s management control head, Basuki Rahmat, said. A resident of Manado, North Sulawesi, was buried in the landslide that hit the region on Wednesday. In Jakarta, according to the agency, 2,761 people affected by floods were still taking refuge in 20 temporary shelters.

“The number may decrease as some of the evacuees have returned home to clean up today,” he said. At least 8,064 people in 10 districts across the capital were affected by the flooding on Monday. The scale of the floods was considered smaller compared to those in January last year, which affected over 15,000 people. Several areas in North Jakarta were also reportedly less affected by Monday’s floods in comparison to the past three years.

The agency provided comparative maps showing a significant decrease in the number of areas affected by the floods. Deputy Governor Basuki “Ahok” Tjahaja Purnama highlighted East Jakarta as the municipality most affected by floods this year.

“We saw less severe floods in many areas but an embankment in Depok [West Java] collapsed. We can be a bit more relaxed this year, however, as all flood pumps, including those in Ancol, Mangga Dua, Pademangan [North Jakarta] and the Melati Reservoir [Central Jakarta] are working well,” he said at City Hall on Wednesday.

Ahok was also upbeat that the impact would not be as severe as last year, when part of the West Flood Canal embankment on Jl. Latuharhari, Central Jakarta, collapsed and the overflowed river inundated the capital’s main thoroughfares. Ahok emphasized the city would continue the rain-modification program, which has been in operation since Tuesday, to avoid unexpected floods.

“I’d rather spend Rp 20 billion [US\$1.66 million] to avoid risks than suffer Rp 20 trillion in losses,” he said.

Jakarta witnessed one of its most devastating disasters when substantial flooding inundated 70 percent of the capital’s land mass in 2007, causing 57 deaths and displacing 450,000. Separately, one person died and 2,000 local residents were evacuated after floods and landslides hit North Sulawesi, affecting 11 districts including Sicala, Wenang, Singkil, Wanea, Tunginting, Paal Dua, Paal Empat and Bunaken, according to the National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB). One person in Tombulu, Minahasa, was still missing as of Wednesday.

BNPB spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said low air pressure in the Philippines had affected weather in North Sulawesi and caused flash floods, landslides and high waves in the province’s waters. The agency has worked with the police, the Indonesian Army, the National Search and Rescue Agency (Basarnas) and the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) to evacuate residents.

Public Works Minister Djoko Kirmanto said various efforts, aside from infrastructure projects, should be carried out simultaneously to minimize the impact of annual flooding in the capital.

“Among the biggest challenges is changing residents’ bad habits such as littering or building houses on the riverbanks,” Djoko said.

The ministry has earmarked Rp 1.6 trillion this year for the capital’s flood mitigation projects, lower than the Rp 2 trillion last year. The Public Works Ministry’s mineral water resources director general, Mohammad Hasan, said the budget might increase in this year’s revised state budget.

“However, this all depends on the land acquisition process conducted by the city administration,” Hasan said. The projects include the restoration of four major rivers in the city — the Pesanggrahan, Angke, Sunter and Ciliwung rivers — and the Jakarta Emergency Dredging Initiative. Data from the ministry showed that the restoration of Pesanggrahan, Angke and Sunter rivers was set to be completed this year, while the Ciliwung River dredging project is due to be completed in 2016. (nai)