

# Mampang squatters evicted to widen river

An otherwise normal Monday morning in the neighborhoods surrounding the Mampang River was punctuated by the sound of sledgehammers smashing concrete and the growl of an excavator demolishing homes, as the South Jakarta municipal administration commenced its endeavor to relocate residents, prevent future flooding and “normalize” the area.

The efforts began Monday morning around 8 a.m., taking place in the areas of Tegal Parang, Pela Mampang and Mampang Prapatan, all of which are home to dwellings that sit on the banks of the flood-prone Mampang River.

To combat the consistently rising water levels, the administration has ordered the demolition of homes anywhere from 5 to 10 meters from the edge of a 3-kilometer (km) stretch of riverbank. The administration then plans to build flood levies, inspection roads and gardens. In addition, the riverbed will be dredged to help alleviate congested water flow.

Monday’s operation seemed to draw little resistance from residents, with some even getting their hands dirty and helping out with the demolition.

“The river used to be wide, but now many people have added [dirt] to its banks to build houses, making it narrow,” said Haji Murodi, a Pela Mampang resident. He said that after the most recent and allegedly reportedly abnormally heavy flooding in the area, he reported the matter to the South Jakarta municipal office, calling for dredging and the construction of levies.

However, the plan will result in the destruction of 300 homes that formerly housed over 370 families, and some residents are upset with the city’s approach to informing the local community about the relocation, as well as the handling of the project in general.

The administration reportedly conducted an information-dissemination period only two days prior to Monday’s demolitions, where it talked to community members about the upcoming project. “If people had a problem or wanted to protest, they could attend [the dissemination session],” said Yulia Mulyani, an official from the South Jakarta mayor’s office.

Ida, a resident of Pela Mampang who makes tempeh and sells it at a local market for a living, said that she had been forced to put her business on hold due to the plans to destroy the building that formerly housed her equipment, as well as a lack of time to find a new place. “Two days is too quick,” said Ida.

Conflictingly, South Jakarta Mayor Syamsuddin Noor said that the community engagement had occurred one week ago. He added that people who had only recently found out about the plan may have been in towns outside of Jakarta during the information dissemination.

Tigor, a lawyer with the Jakarta Legal Aid Foundation (LBH Jakarta) said that after talking with numerous local families and residents, none said that city officials had approached them prior to last Thursday.

To make matters more complicated, only some of the people affected will be relocated to recently constructed low-income housing projects in East Jakarta.

According to Fidiyah, residents who can prove that they live in Jakarta and own property will be allowed to live in the apartments, whereas those living as tenants with monthly or yearly contracts will be on their own to find new accommodation.

“Contract tenants don’t have rights to their housing, so they must find somewhere else. Many people who moved here from outside Jakarta live on [rental] contracts, and don’t have Jakarta ID cards,” said Fidiyah.

On Monday, Iya, a resident of Mampang Prapatan since 1997 and the tenant of a rental property, was evicted just before her house was destroyed.

“My stuff was thrown out, so I had to move,” she said. “I’m sad of course. Where am I going to go? I have no money,” she added.

Diyah, the owner of rental units in Mampang Prapatan that were destroyed, said that she pleaded with Public Order Agency (Satpol PP) personnel to not tear into the properties with sledgehammers. “I told them ‘please wait’ [and asked] ‘what specific distance from the river bank do you need clear?’. They kept going,” she said.