

Riau haze mitigation post reopened

Upon watching and reading news about floods hitting Jakarta, Semarang and Manado, down to medium cities and small towns in various parts of Indonesia recently, all parties must feel ashamed.

It is not only government officials who should be embarrassed, but also developers, legislators, scientists and researchers, as well as the architects and planners who have contributed to environmentally unfriendly places to live.

It seems most urban planners have tended to ignore the environmental capacities of areas and ecological footprint assessments.

Jakarta is the worst example. Official data says remaining public green open spaces in the capital are at a level of only 9.8 percent, while the Spatial Planning Law mandates every city to set aside a level of 20 percent for public green open space and 10 percent for private space.

Jakarta has violated the law. The brand of Jakarta as a city of a thousand malls, is embarrassing and heartbreaking given that much of its population lives under the poverty line. A lot of luxury skyscrapers in the form of malls, supermalls, department stores, plazas and hotels have encroached upon urban parks and even graveyards.

Conurbation management of the area popularly known as Jabotabek (Jakarta, Bogor, Tangerang, Bekasi), which evolved into Jabodetabek with the inclusion of Depok and then Jabodetabekjur (plus Cianjur), is a good starting point for the integration of the systemic and holistic development of Greater Jakarta.

However, as is the case in Pancasila, its weakness lies in the implementation or execution. The Puncak area in Bogor, for example, has clearly been defined as a conservation region or water catchment area, in order to prevent rainwater from flooding Jakarta directly. But the reality shows that villas, restaurants, cafes, shops and hotels are scattered across the hills of Puncak.

The illegal development of Puncak took place without strict developmental control. There are allegations that public officials messed up the licensing. Only when floods devastated Jakarta in 2013 and 2014 did officials hurriedly demolish the villas in Puncak on the grounds they had not built permits. It is well known that the owners of those illegal villas are mostly rich people from Jakarta.

To correct long-standing mistakes, Jabodetabekjur should be empowered so that it holds a strong position, power and authority to manage the whole region harmoniously. Big floods hitting Jakarta will worsen if business is gone about as usual.

Closer cooperation between Jakarta and surrounding cities such as Bogor, Tangerang, Bekasi and the neighboring provinces of West Java and Banten, should be encouraged using "stick and carrot" or "incentive and disincentive" mechanisms. In the city of Jakarta itself, since some areas lie below sea level, floating buildings or flexible housing resting on pillars could be introduced.

The transportation system should not simply rely on land transportation, but also on water transportation systems. In residential areas located above sea level, residents should be required by law to make infiltration wells, rain-harvesting equipment, and "biopores" to store water.

Public officials should also consider a moratorium on commercial building construction, especially new skyscrapers such as malls, supermalls, offices and hotels. High-rise buildings should be permitted only for rented flats and owned flats for low-income communities, to realize the program of "A thousand towers" once echoed by former vice president Jusuf Kalla.

