

Flood hits Kampung Pulo, again

Flooding has hit thousands of homes in Kampung Pulo, East Jakarta, over the last two days after heavy rain fell in Bogor, West Java, increasing water levels in the Katulampa reservoir to rise and causing the Ciliwung River to burst its banks. The floodwater, which reached up to 2 meters in some places, inundated almost all the houses in the area but no fatalities have been reported and nobody was evacuated; most residents stayed on the second floors of their homes, as is their habit during the height of the rainy season. According to the head of neighborhood unit (RT) 4, Usep Tahrudin, the flooding hit Kampung Pulo on Thursday afternoon. The water receded after several hours, only to return at a higher level at dawn on Friday. "At midnight we received information that more floodwater was coming. So, thankfully, we were able to anticipate and make preparations," Usep told The Jakarta Post on Friday. Usep added that the level of floodwater on the roads reached 1.5 meters, leaving most houses in the neighborhood inundated. However, locals were still in their homes as they could stay on the second floors.

"The flooding hasn't reached 2 meters so we're still safe. We can still sleep on the second floor [of our home]. We've experienced worse conditions before," Usep said. He and his neighbors quickly moved their belongings upstairs to the second floors of their homes after hearing the announcement. Fifty-four-year-old Usep said people in the area were now accustomed to flooding. Most of them had even prepared survival kits in case they needed to evacuate. One resident, Rosalina, said her children had even begun to enjoy the flooding. While she was busy trying to clean her house of the floodwater, her two daughters were playfully splashing each other. Like Usep, Rosalina and her family did not evacuate, as the upstairs of their house was still dry.

"My children like to swim in the floodwater after school. They've become accustomed to flooding," she said. Although most Kampung Pulo residents have become used to floods, some have started to complain that they are occurring more often than in the past. Rudi, who has lived in Kampung Pulo all his life, said there had been floods than usual this year. "We used to suffer flooding only once every five years. But this month alone, floods have hit us 10 times. It's getting worse," Rudi said. As a solution to the worsening situation, the Jakarta administration has plans in place to rehabilitate the Ciliwung River. Once the work on the river begins, thousands of people living along the riverbanks will be evicted and relocated. The city administration is currently building rusunawa (low-cost rental apartments) for the relocation.

"I once refused to be relocated, but I have changed my mind. I will gladly move to the rusunawa once construction is complete, as long as the government pays compensation," Rudi said. However, most people were unwilling to be relocated because the administration was only offering a small amount of compensation money, he added. Separately, Jakarta Deputy Governor Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama told reporters at City Hall on Friday that the administration had already agreed to pay compensation for the buildings and land occupied by the riverbank squatters. However, the amount of compensation paid would be different to property market prices, he said. "We have regulations to determine the amounts of compensation. For example, compensation to someone on land who does not have an ownership certificate will only be 80 percent of the value of the taxable property," he said. Ahok said that although the administration was ready to pay the compensation, squatters still wanted to negotiate with the Building Construction, Supervision and Regulation Agency (P2B) about the amounts they would receive. "If they don't want to follow our plan, their houses will be flooded again," he said. Ahok said if the squatters were willing to leave, he guaranteed that their new homes would be free from flooding.