

City speeds up river normalization projects

In a bid to decrease flooding, the Public Works Ministry and the Jakarta administration has completed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to speed up the normalization of the city's main rivers, including Pesanggrahan River.

Public Works Ministry director general of water resources Mohammad Hasan said on Friday at City Hall that the ministry and the city administration would work together to speed up the normalization project.

"It's entering the third year. We've finished 70 percent of our task to clean and dredge main rivers like the Pesanggrahan and Angke," he said.

Hasan said the ministry had allocated Rp 250 billion (US\$21.5 million) for the physical work while the administration had also provided Rp 250 billion for land acquisitions in the vicinity of the Pesanggrahan, Angke and Sunter rivers.

"Normalization depends on land acquisitions and its process cannot be rushed," he said. Jakarta Governor Joko "Jokowi" Widodo said the city administration was now racing against time. "We want to finish the land acquisitions and normalization before the rainy season by the end of this year," he said.

Jokowi said the land acquisitions and river dredging would be done concurrently. "We're acquiring land along the dike of the Pesanggrahan River," he said. The governor claimed the land acquisitions faced no problems.

"We face no obstacles. If there is one person who protests among 1,000 people, it is normal," he said. Separately, Deputy Governor Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama said the land acquisitions could not be conducted if low-cost apartments for the relocation were unavailable.

"We're trying to make a list of residents living in existing low-cost apartments and evict ineligible tenants to give subsidized apartments to relocated residents first," he said.

Ahok said the city targeted 200,000 units of low-cost rental apartments to accommodate low-income families who were living on riverbanks and close to reservoirs.

"If the construction of the apartments runs smoothly, we're targeting the normalization to be complete in 2015," he said.

The administration will also normalize dams and create new reservoirs. University of Indonesia (UI) water specialist Firdaus Ali said the achievements of the Jokowi administration were extraordinary.

"Many projects that have been abandoned for years are now progressing," he said. Firdaus gave examples of the Pluit Dam in North Jakarta, which for 30 years was never taken care of but was now being normalized, as well as the Ria Rio reservoir in East Jakarta.

However, he said such efforts would not yet lead to a significant decrease in flooding. "We are facing weather anomalies. As of today, we still have rain. However, the impacts would have been worse if the projects had not been carried out," he said.