

Flooding, landslides cause ongoing death and destruction

Floods and landslides in most parts of Central Java have caused dozens of casualties, damaged hundreds of kilometers of roads and destroyed thousands of hectares of crops. The Central Java Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) recorded 20 fatalities due to flooding and landslides as of Feb. 4. Eighteen of the deaths were a result of landslides and the two others died in floods.

Central Java BNPB acting head Sarwa Pramana specified that 12 people were killed in a landslide in Kudus, four in Kebumen, and one each in Jepara and in Semarang. The two flood-related deaths were in Pekalongan and Purworejo.

Sarwa called on residents living on hillsides and river banks to remain on the alert. As of February this year a total of 53 flooding incidents had taken place in Central Java.

Incessant rains over the past three weeks in the northern coast of the province have caused severe damage to 130 kilometers of road.

Meanwhile, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono inspected the progress of road repairs in Pekalongan on Tuesday.

According to Deputy Minister of Public Works Hermanto Dardak, the total length of damaged roads in coastal areas of northern Java amounts to 410 km. "As many as 30 percent, or 130 kilometers, has been damaged," he said.

Head of technical development at state-owned highway company Bina Marga's Central Java office Hanung Triyono said the losses incurred from the disasters in the province had reached Rp 466 billion (US\$38 million).

Bina Marga reported that as many as 158 stretches of national and provincial roads in the province were damaged due to floods and high rainfall.

Based on data derived from the National Road Supervision and Planning Agency, the length of damaged road surface on the north coast highway, the Pantura, amounted to 167 kilometers of the total 495 kilometers, or 34 percent, as of Jan. 27. Damaged roads along the southern coast of Central Java, including the southern highway, amounted to 94 kilometers of the total 981 kilometers.

Hanung said many of the damaged roads were found in a number of points in Central Java, such as in Semarang and Cilacap. "We can not completely repair all the roads, but have carried out repairs based on priority, such as the roads in Blora, Rembang, Purwodadi and Semarang," said Hanung.

More permanent repairs would be carried out in March, he said, adding that the repairs would cost Rp 111 billion. Floods also engulfed railway tracks along the northern coastal areas, forcing state railway company PT KAI divert trains from Jakarta to the southern track.

"The trains from Jakarta have arrived an hour late on average since the route was diverted to the southern line," PT KAI's Purwokerto's spokesman Surono said.

Meanwhile, floods have also caused the failure of at least 13,000 hectares of rice crops. Central Java acting provincial secretary Sri Puryono said crop failures had occurred in 10 regencies and municipalities.

"The total area of rice fields in the 10 regencies and municipalities engulfed by floods is 44,000 hectares, 13,000 hectares of which are subject to harvest failure," said Puryono.

The areas of swamped rice fields were in Kudus, Pati, Jepara, Demak, Pekalongan and Kendal regencies.

Puryono added that the Agriculture Ministry would provide rice seedlings to help farmers whose rice fields were inundated by floods.