

Editorial: The giant reclamation

The plan to build a giant seawall and 17 manmade islands in northern Jakarta could be seen as a breakthrough in an effort to revamp the ugly look of the city's coastal areas. On the other hand, it could also spark new problems, particularly if the planners fail to anticipate the adverse impact of the US\$24.7 billion project on the environment. Therefore, the environmental impact assessment (AMDAL), which is now being reviewed by the Environment Ministry, should guarantee that the megaproject has anticipated any possible ecological destruction as a result of the reclamation of 5,153 hectares of the sea north of the capital.

The multi-purpose project, known as the National Capital Integrated Coastal Development (NCICD), involves both the central and Jakarta governments and is supported by seven property giants, according to Eko Budi Kurniawan, head of the urban department at the Public Works Ministry. On the reclaimed islands, which will form the shape of a flying bird, various modern facilities including commercial centers, hotels, apartments and tourism spots will be built.

The reclamation is inspired by a previous project in Dubai, which has now become a prominent tourist destination.

Currently, despite its great economic potential, many parts of northern Jakarta look gloomy and poorly managed. The development of the new area is expected to have positive effects on the surrounding areas.

However, the ecological consideration should come first before the economic benefits. As a reminder, Jakarta under former governor Sutiyoso introduced a mass sea reclamation project. The plan ended in failure due to strong opposition from green activists, who feared that the project could worsen flooding and incite other new problems.

Therefore, the Environment Ministry needs to assess carefully the AMDAL to ensure that all possible environmental problems have been anticipated and addressed. The ministry will be held responsible for an environmental catastrophe resulting from the reclamation project.

The ministry also has to look closely into the AMDAL to ensure the developers have adequately anticipated environmental problems stemming from human activities in the new areas. The developers, for example, have to develop sustainable waste management and ensure sustainable water resources.

Waste management is imperative because the city remains dependent on a landfill in the satellite city of Bekasi in West Java. The AMDAL should convince the city government that clean water supplies for the new islands will not burden the long-standing shortage plaguing Jakarta.

Many city residents rely on groundwater because tap water operators have been unable to fulfill the people's needs.

In the future, the reclamation project could stand out as an icon of Jakarta and a symbol of the city's prosperity, as well as the country's burgeoning economy.

But it should never force Jakarta citizens to pay dearly for an environmental calamity if both the developers and the government ignore prudence. History has taught that such risk cannot be belittled.