

Mangroves planted to protect Semarang's new Ahmad Yani airport from coastal Erosion

Dozens of schoolchildren and hundreds of university students and soldiers helped to protect Ahmad Yani International Airport in Semarang, Central Java, from coastal erosion by planting 10,000 mangroves on Maron Beach on Saturday.

Medicine producer PT Phapros donated the mangroves being planted. "We launched the 'Go Green' program by planting mangroves on Maron Beach, Semarang, in 2011. We have so far planted 380,000 mangroves in the area," Phapros' president director Iswanto said.

He said the program had been conducted in cooperation with Diponegoro University's student community KeSEMaT who shared the company's concern about mangrove preservation.

The planting, according to Iswanto, was also an attempt to educate younger generations to love nature and to develop their support for mangrove conservation.

"We have also conducted research by taking samples of mangrove products to see if they can be further developed for added value," said Iswanto adding that the alkaloid content in the plant's fruit and seeds might be able to be developed into a medicinal product.

Studies have revealed that Semarang's northern coastal area has been experiencing erosion by up to 50 meters annually.

If nothing is done it is feared the erosion will cause problems at Ahmad Yani's runway, which is located only about a kilometer from the beach.

The research also revealed that some 70 percent of the mangroves along Semarang's coastline have been damaged due to the ignorance of local people who have cleared mangroves for the wood and converted the areas into fish ponds.

According to satellite data, mangrove forests in Indonesia cover an area of around 3.1 million hectares, the second-biggest in the world after Brazil. This accounts for 22.6 percent of the world's total mangrove forests.

Separately, commander of the Military Regional Command (Kodam) IV/Diponegoro, Maj. Gen. Sunindyo who joined the planting on Saturday, said that he had commanded all the TNI (Indonesian Military) personnel assigned to coastal regions to plant and preserve mangroves.

"The TNI has fields in coastal regions such as in Cilacap, Pekalongan, Semarang, Kendal and Rembang," he said.

He hoped that the private sector would participate in and care about the preservation of the environment by planting mangroves.

The cooperation between the private sector, local administrations, the TNI and police, he said, could be conducted like in a war zone, i.e. by establishing sectors.

It was reported earlier that the government planned to build a "floating" passenger terminal on a platform in the sea as part of the expansion project of the airport. The airport operator PT Angkasa Pura I said that the expansion would allow the airport to accommodate up to 6 to 7 million passengers annually, up from 3.2 million as of the end of 2013.