

## Seawall could prove to be problematic

Jakartans living with the constant threat of seawater inundation in Muara Baru, North Jakarta, are worried that the rainy season will add to their woes by causing prolonged flooding. Flooding will mean higher living costs for the urban poor of the RT 15 neighborhood located on the city's north coast as when it rains heavily the water can swamp and isolate the area for days.

"During the last flood, the water swamped our neighborhood for two months. We don't know what will happen this time," said pedicab driver Bleman.

"[Under such circumstances] residents who want to go somewhere have to rent a boat costing Rp 100,000 [US\$11.3] one way for a distance of about two kilometers," added resident Irwan Palesman-Abdullah, who has lived in the area since arriving from West Nusa Tenggara in 1967.

"Usually they share the cost with four other people. Otherwise they have to take the long way around," he added.

"The condition has never been good – seawater swamps houses by up to one and a half meters every high tide."

Health problems, such as coughing and skin ailments, are also common for neighborhood residents," Irwan continued.

"People here have just gotten used to these things," Irwan said.

Three months ago the residents were pleased that the Jakarta Bay seawall was made higher, from half a meter tall to nearly two meters.

Irwan acknowledged that seawater had not inundated his house since the seawall was made higher.

"I'm happy that I don't have to worry about flooding every high tide," the man, who works as a laborer at a nearby warehouse, told The Jakarta Post recently.

Bleman shared his sentiments, saying that seawater only inundated the roads now.

About knee-deep water, which comes from the clogged gutters, floods the access road. The road is one of the shortest routes to the neighborhood, where there are also many warehouses.

The seawall protecting the neighborhood has collapsed several times after being hit by large waves. The residents have no idea whether the seawall will prevent flooding in the upcoming rainy season.

Irwan said that most of the residents, who are mostly low-income people residing there illegally, had no choice but to stay put.

"We'll just stay here until the land owner tells us to leave," Irwan said.

Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) researcher Heri Andreas said that the seawall could create rather than solve problems for residents living in the city's north coastal area.

"The seawall is a temporary solution. It protects the neighborhood from seawater, but when the raining season comes, it could increase the risk of flooding because it could retain rainwater coming from Jakarta's southern area.

"The water would be 'trapped' there," Heri told the Post. Heri said that Jakarta needed an absorption area and pumps to prevent flooding.

"Jakarta needs at least a 50-square-kilometer absorption area to absorb water coming from higher areas in the south, which we definitely don't have.

"Another option is to build a seawall farther out to sea to create the 50-square-kilometer area that we need," he said.

Heri added that the seawall could also create a lake that could be used for various purposes, such as freshwater storage. (swd)