

## Catchment area forest clearance blamed for Bandung flooding

Clearance of catchment areas in the northern Bandung mountainous region has been blamed for the escalating number of floods in the city.

Scores of cars were trapped in 1.5-meter-deep flood water in front of the Bandung Trade Center on Jl. Pasteur, just 1 kilometer from the Pasteur toll exit, a main gateway to Bandung on Wednesday, which saw the worst floods since November last year. In a social media site, a minivan was shown submerged in flood water up to its windows.

Heavy rain began to fall at around 2 p.m. on Wednesday, inundating several areas. The conditions were exacerbated by poor drainage.

The water level rose suddenly in the Pasteur area at around 6 p.m. when rush hour commuters were trapped in traffic congestion.

A resident of Jl. Buahbatu, Irvan Christianto, 26, who was traveling on a shuttle van to Jakarta, said he experienced the worst congestion when he was caught in traffic for 1.5 hours from the Pasirkaliki intersection to the Pasteur toll gate, a journey of only around 1.5 km.

"The traffic didn't move. Police then rerouted traffic from the opposite direction on to the lane which was not severely affected by the floods," Irvan told The Jakarta Post in Bandung on Thursday.

Thousands of vehicles intending to enter the Pasteur toll gate were also trapped in a 5-km tailback. Traffic was backed up to the Baros area in Cimahi municipality from the toll gate.

Bandung Deputy Mayor Ayi Vivananda expressed concern over the floods in Cileuncang which were followed by the collapse of a river embankment in Bandung city. Hundreds of homes in several areas were inundated. However, he surmised that street flooding was caused by clogged, silted up and narrow drains, not simply the heavy rain.

"The rainfall was extreme and exceeded the drainage capacity," Ayi told the Post on Thursday.

He said the municipality was making efforts to divert rivers and normalize drains along Jl. Pasteur and dredging badly silted up rivers.

West Java Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) executive director Dadan Ramdan blamed the problem on forest clearance north of Bandung.

Walhi data shows these conservation and catchment areas retain 60 percent of the water supply for residents living in the Bandung basin area.

Dozens of local bylaws and environmental ministerial decrees on the northern Bandung area have not been able to protect the area from destruction.

"The transfer of responsibility for the northern Bandung area from the provincial to regency and mayoralty administrations has enabled local administrations to issue building permits to developers," said Dadan.

At the end of November, former West Java governor Solihin G.P. declared war against a developer in the Punclut area in northern Bandung who had obtained management rights from the government for residential development.

"Punclut is in Greater Bandung's northern area core zone and, according to regulation, it should not be developed because it serves as a catchment area. Fandam and Ciputra only see Punclut from the business and financial aspects, but I see it from the environmental side," said Solihin.

