

Batam, Denpasar win awards for clean air

The Environment Ministry has given Batam, Riau Islands and Denpasar, Bali, the Langit Biru (Blue Sky) award for maintaining good air quality in their respective regions.

Environment Minister Balthasar Kambuaya said at an award-presentation ceremony on Monday that Batam and Denpasar topped the list of major cities in terms of scores for emission levels, air quality, fuel quality and the ease of traffic.

The two cities were also recognized for their performance in monitoring air quality, reducing air pollution and raising people's awareness about air pollution.

In the metropolitan city category, Medan in North Sumatra finished in third position, lagging behind Tangerang, Banten and South Jakarta. Fourteen cities made it onto the list in this category.

"I hope the winning cities can keep maintaining their air quality. In addition to that, they should also improve the quality of their water for the sake of the people," Balthasar said.

Mayor of Medan Rahudman Harahap said that his city could perform better in reducing air pollution once the bus rapid transit (BRT) system in the northern side of the city, Belawan, was operational early next year.

A.A. Bagus Sudharsana, head of Denpasar Environmental Agency, said that the city earmarked Rp 2.5 billion (US\$259,202) to pay the land tax for privately owned green space.

"Most of the green spaces in Denpasar are private property. Therefore, we provide the incentive to ensure that the owners will maintain their lands as green spaces," he said.

Balthasar hoped the award would encourage other local administrations across the archipelago to improve the quality of the environment.

"Article 28 of the Constitution stipulates the right of citizens to live in a decent environment. This means that all local administrations are obliged to realize that [condition]," the minister said.

The ministry also named Padang in West Sumatra and Pontianak in West Kalimantan as major cities with the worst air quality.

Makassar in South Sulawesi and Central Jakarta are at the bottom of the list in the metropolitan category.

The ministry also announced that three cities in the country had alarming levels of carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide.

Gorontalo, North Sulawesi and Banda Aceh, Nangroe Aceh Darussalam, respectively, recorded carbon monoxide concentrations of 12 µg/m³ and 16 µg/m³, surpassing the limit of 10 µg/m³.

Samarinda, East Kalimantan recorded nitrogen dioxide concentrations of 180 µg/m³, far above the national standard of 150 µg/m³.

Khalisah Khalid of the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) said that the air quality in big cities in Java Island had been on the decline in recent years due to increasing industrial activities.

"We also found that bad air quality in Central Kalimantan and South Sumatra was due to a rising number of forest fires," she said. (yps)