

Sanitary problems linger despite awards

Residents of Cipinang Ilir in East Jakarta may be free from flooding partly thanks to the East Flood Canal, but they now face other issues, as the water of Cipinang River that flows past their houses has turned black, producing a sickening stench.

A nearby resident, Jefri Ivan, said that before the East Flood Canal started operating, it rarely produced the bad smell despite the fact that plenty still threw household garbage into the river.

“Now the heavy stench is usually around in the morning and late afternoon, and anytime the wind blows. But since the canal started to operate, the water does not flow as smooth as it did before, maybe because the waterway is partly blocked, I don’t know.”

The 23.5-kilometer canal started to operate in late 2009 after having been constructed in six years. It is designed to protect the eastern part of the capital from flooding, crossing five major waterways in East Jakarta: Cipinang River, Sunter River, Buaran River, Jati Kramat River and Cakung River.

People living on riverbanks often make the rivers their waste disposal sites, which makes almost all rivers in the capital heavily polluted.

On the temporary dump site at the Manggarai sluice gate in South Jakarta, tons of garbage is taken from the Ciliwung River every day.

With heavy machinery, officers can dredge out Styrofoam, plastics, beds, tires, even logs from the river. “During rainy season, more than 10 garbage trucks pick up piles of garbage before dumping them to Bantar Gebang,” said Kusno who lives at the site, referring to the Jakarta-operated landfill in Bekasi, West Java.

“Residents come here to pool their garbage, too,” he added.

Sri Bebasari from the Indonesian Solid Waste Association said that the lack of integrated waste management in each municipality had led to the establishments of many illegal dump sites near the river and neighborhood.

“We don’t have the waste management system yet. Lack of awareness from residents has also worsened the waste problems in the city,” she said, adding that it would take years before the city could be free from these kinds of issues.

Jakarta produces around 6,000 tons of solid waste a day, 4,500 tons of which is dumped at the 110-hectare Bantar Gebang site. To reduce the city’s dependency on the Bantar Gebang landfill, it will privatize waste management by operating three Intermediary Waste Treatment Facilities (ITF) in the city.

Currently, only one ITF in Cakung-Cilincing in North Jakarta is operating with the capacity to process 400 tons of garbage per day.

The administration is also preparing a master plan on waste management for the next 20 years that will include a specific strategy to improve sanitation and the development of necessary sanitary infrastructure.

Despite the sanitary problems, four of the city's five municipalities won Adipura environmental awards this year. Only West Jakarta failed to win the award, winning instead the second-best Adipura plate in the metropolitan city category.

DKI Jakarta was also awarded "best environmental status" along with West Sumatra and East Java.

According to the Environment Ministry, 75 percent of the assessment of this year's Adipura focused on physical conditions and the remaining 25 percent on non-physical.

The ministry assessed, among others, the condition of roads, rivers, traditional markets, hospitals, schools, terminals, dump sites and the so-called "3R" system (reduce, reuse, recycle) in cities.

The award, however, has surprised some residents.

Otto Ferdinand, a resident of Semper in North Jakarta, questioned the assessment process. "If the assessment criteria includes the condition of roads and rivers, then how come North Jakarta could win it? Many roads are damaged around my neighborhood. The river near my house is far from clean; it's dirty, and you can literally walk on the river by stepping on all the garbage floating on it," he said.

But Tauchid Tjakra Amidjaya, city head of the Environmental Management Agency (BPLHD) said that the city deserved the award, as it had worked hard and made significant progress in sanitation, which he believed was a major factor in winning the award.