

TNI helps boost greening in N. Sumatra for defense purposes

The Bukit Barisan District Military Command is striving to help boost a greening program in North Sumatra, especially around Lake Toba, in a bid to help improve defense purposes. Chief of the military command Maj. Gen. Lodewijk Paulus said at the launch of the Medan Go Green program in Medan over the weekend that greening was badly needed as the condition of forests in the area was deteriorating at a fast rate and the environment was being polluted.

The Medan Go Green scheme, a collaborative effort with the police and the Medan city administration, is part of a large-scale greening program initiated by the Bukit Barisan District Military Command. Activities of the Medan Go Green program include the planting of about 3,000 tree seedlings of different varieties along the Belawan river in Medan.

Also present at the launching of the tree-planting program were North Sumatra Police chief Insp. Gen. Wisjnu Amat Satro, Medan Mayor Rahudman Harahap and various representatives from the local community, including religious figures, youth leaders and students. According to Lodewijk, the Indonesian Military (TNI) has the obligation to help reforest damaged forest areas for the sake of defense purposes aside from environmental preservation.

"Many trees in a particular area will prevent an enemy's satellite from penetrating it. That's why we want to help renew the damaged forests to strengthen our defense," he said. The Bukit Barisan command's reforestation program will cover at least 300,000 hectares of damaged forests near Lake Toba, Lodewijk said, adding that the program had been started as soon as he was sworn in as the new district military commander several months ago.

Lodewijk went on to say that North Sumatra was prone to external threats due to the fact that large swathes of its forested areas had been damaged. This condition, if it remained unchecked, he said, would enable outsiders to easily penetrate Indonesia's defense systems. He cited as an example the defense systems in the Middle East, which could be detected with relative ease by satellite simply because of the absence of cover due to the arid conditions.

"We want to protect our defense systems from all foreign satellites, and one way to do that is by repairing and rejuvenating the damaged forests," Lodewijk reiterated. In addition to the defense benefits and environmental preservation, he said, the greening activities would also help improve the welfare of local people, as the choice of trees being planted included varieties that would be beneficial for them, such as mahogany and hazelnut.

North Sumatra Police chief Insp. Gen. Wisjnu Amat Sastro said that the police fully supported the TNI's initiative to help boost forest regeneration in the province. Wisjnu explained that one of the ways in which the police would support the program would be its commitment toward eradicating illegal logging activities. He admitted that the excessive rate of deforestation in North Sumatra had been caused mainly by rampant illegal logging practices.

"Many areas of our forests have been destroyed by [hitherto] uncontrolled illegal logging practices. The police, in cooperation with all related parties, including the TNI, will do their best to fight against such practices," Wisjnu said, urging the public not to hesitate to report any illegal logging activities being carried out in their areas.