

## Labuan Bajo to address garbage problem

Labuan Bajo, the capital of West Manggarai regency in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), is striving to tackle its problems with garbage in an effort to help attract an increasing number of domestic and foreign tourists.

West Manggarai Regent Agustinus Ch. Dula admitted over the weekend that Labuan Bajo had sanitation problems that, if neglected, could discourage tourists from visiting the regency, including famous Komodo Island and other smaller islets suitable for recreation.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Clean-up Day activities initiated by Swisscontact, Regent Dula attributed the garbage problems to lack of public awareness about the importance of sanitation.

Various efforts have been implemented by the West Manggarai regency administration to improve awareness by, among others, encouraging people to dispose of garbage in available waste bins. The results, however, have unfortunately not yet met expectations.

“I constantly encourage Labuan Bajo residents to clean up garbage,” he said, adding that his administration had been committed to making Labuan Bajo the cleanest city in Flores, in cooperation with various NGOs, tourism companies and hotel owners. “Thousands of junior high and high school students from Labuan Bajo have been deployed to help clean nearby islands, either at tourist sites such as Komodo, Rinca Island or other tourism areas on smaller islands,” he said.

Swisscontact program officer Sumandar Situmorang said that the Clean-up Day activities in Labuan Bajo involved the participation of not only students, but also civil servants. “The clean up activities were part of the commemoration of World Clean-up Day and were launched in Labuan Bajo, the future international tourism city in Flores,” he said.

Swiscontact’s development manager in Flores, Zakarias Samuel Sem, explained that his institution had conducted surveys and research on garbage problems four times in Labuan Bajo. One of the most crucial problems in the city dealt with garbage management. Rubbish had disturbed tourists visiting the area in the past.

“Labuan Bajo constitutes the future international tourism city in Flores, so it is time for the local administration, with the help of local people and private institutions stationed in the city, to jointly cooperate in addressing the garbage problem,” Zakarias said. He further said that as a result of the campaign there had been a group of young people in the city who were willing to manage garbage by processing waste into various products made of plastic.

Head of the Community Movement against Mining in Flores, Florianu Adu, hoped that the clean-up activities would be able to raise awareness among local residents about cleanliness. Adu asked the West Manggarai regency administration to be more aggressive in their cleanliness campaign.

The administration focused nearly 50 percent of its development programs on tourism, but garbage has continued to pile up nearly everywhere. “For residents, remind them not to litter and for the administration, do not hesitate to continue maintaining cleanliness in the city,” Adu said.

The West Manggarai regency received its autonomous status on July 17, 2003 and is responsible for its own internal affairs, including managing the endangered Komodo dragon at Komodo National Park.