

City spruces up cemeteries to add more green space

In the near future, Jakarta cemeteries will no longer only be for the dead as the administration will start to spruce them up to meet the target for more green public spaces in the capital. Jakarta Parks and Cemetery Agency chief Catharina Suryowati said that the administration planned to revitalize cemeteries in the city so that they could also be used as proper green space and a place where people can socialize.

“Cemeteries have long been associated with haunted images, so we’re trying to change that by adding some aesthetic touches,” she said on Sunday.

In Pondok Kelapa Cemetery in East Jakarta and Kampung Kandang Cemetery in South Jakarta, for example, the agency has improved the entrance gates and stopped planting frangipani trees around the area and replaced them with shade trees and small plants.

Many people still believe that frangipani trees are haunted and they often become a shelter for ghosts. “We will also do these kinds of improvements in other cemeteries,” Catharina said.

To improve cemeteries in the city, the agency will also prohibit the erection of small walls around tombs higher than 10 centimeters. Besides improving existing cemeteries, Catharina also said that the administration would build parks on empty land allocated for cemetery expansion.

“In most cases, cemeteries are often made into green spaces. And this time, we are also trying to make more parks in cemetery compounds,” she said.

In 2009, the administration bought land for the expansion of cemeteries in Pondok Rangun in East Jakarta; Kampung Kandang and Jeruk Purut in South Jakarta; and Rorotan and Semper in North Jakarta. In the future, parks and other public spaces will be built at those locations.

“But I can’t say exactly when we will build the parks there. There are still some issues that need to be resolved first, including documentation,” Catharina said.

The previous administration commercialized cemeteries as filming locations for reality TV shows and dramas when the trend of horror movies and ghost stories hit TV.

Cemeteries have gradually lost their spooky image as seen at the Tegal Alur Cemetery in West Jakarta. A night bazaar enlivened with loud dangdut music draws crowds of people to the cemetery every Saturday.

On Sunday, Jakarta Governor Joko “Jokowi” Widodo ordered the opening of more parks in every subdistrict across the city, promising to increase green spaces during his five-year tenure from its current level of 9.8 percent to at least 20 percent of the city. “We are now still trying to accelerate all processes regarding land clearing. I expect to see a thousand small parks in all subdistricts in the city.”

Jakarta has been moving slowly toward creating green space, including the restoration of river banks and the conversion of several former fuel stations into green areas.

The Jakarta administration has set a target of 34.51 percent of the city’s 662 square kilometers to be converted to green spaces by 2030.