

City, S. Korea intensify Ciliwung River project

The Jakarta administration and the South Korean government are stepping up the pace of flood mitigation efforts in the capital to restore the heavily polluted Ciliwung River. South Korean Ambassador Kim Young-sun said on Friday that he and Jakarta Deputy Governor Basuki “Ahok” Tjahaja Purnama discussed technology that would be used in the river restoration project and its blueprint in a meeting at City Hall.

“The design will finish in April while the construction will start in July and is expected to finish by the end of next year,” he said after the meeting. Kim said the project would be carried out on a stretch of the Ciliwung River between the Istiqlal Grand Mosque and Pasar Baru, both in Central Jakarta, while the construction of the water treatment system would be built next to the mosque.

An education facility would also be built inside the same building as the water treatment system, he said. “We will create an environmental education center on the second floor of the building. There will be a jogging path and a park as well,” he said.

Kim explained that the new building would be another tourist attraction juxtaposed with the mosque, which is visited by 20 million people annually.

“The Jakarta administration will get a new interesting place for its tourism industry,” he said.

According to Kim, the cooperation between his government and the Jakarta administration reflects good ties between Indonesia and South Korea on environmental issues, even though the project was considered a pilot.

Ahok, as the deputy governor is better known, said he was optimistic that Jakartans could maintain the river once it was clean.

“We need to think positive. The administration will certainly act firmly in maintaining the sustainability of the clean river,” he said.

Ahok said the project was essential as the grand mosque was one of the city’s landmarks.

“We cannot bring our state guests to the Istiqlal Mosque while the river stinks,” he said.

In December, Indonesia and South Korea signed an agreement to restore the Ciliwung River.

The agreement commits about US\$10 million to cleaning up the heavily polluted waterway.

Environment ministers from both countries signed a memorandum of understanding on the pilot project.

The cooperative venture plans to restore a total of 13 rivers, beginning with the Ciliwung.

The South Korean government will disburse \$9 million in grants to finance the project on the Ciliwung River, while Indonesia’s Environment Ministry will be contributing around Rp 10 billion (\$1 million).

Environment Minister Balthasar Kambuaya earlier said the Ciliwung restoration project was expected to be completed in 30 months, including the building of a domestic wastewater facility and a learning center along 500 meters of the river.

Jakarta Governor Joko “Jokowi” Widodo said previously that he had visited Seoul on a number of occasions and envied the pristine river banks he found there. “If we want it, I think we can also build a jogging path along our river,” he said.

The Ciliwung River is also one of the places where the administration is considering using bacteria to treat polluted water in a bid to find alternative sources of drinking water for the city. The river has also been blamed as the main cause of flooding that has inundated parts of the city over the years. The river, which flows from Puncak, West Java to Jakarta Bay, will be the focal point of a massive project to dredge and revitalize Jakarta’s rivers — a project that has been stalled since last year.

The administration planned to relocate thousands of squatters who live on the Ciliwung River banks and normalize the river. The City Council also approved a move to increase the local budget to Rp 49.97 trillion this year from Rp 41.35 trillion in 2012 in order to ease the administration’s battle against flooding and traffic issues. (cor)