

River in Kramat Jati turns into landfill



No water in sight:

Residents complain about the stench from garbage that covers the river in Kramat Jati, East Jakarta.

For the last four weeks, Tri Sutarni, a 35-year-old resident of Batu Ampar, Kramat Jati, East Jakarta, has been having trouble sleeping at night. Not only is she woken by the incessant buzzing of mosquitoes that fly around her but is also kept awake by the itchininess of the bites that cover her body. In the afternoon, she has to close all the windows and doors to barricading her house from armies of flies. Tri also has to cover her nose due to the putrid smell emanating from the sprawling garbage, which has been clogging the river in front of her house for the last month. The river, running from the Induk Kramat Jati market to Cililitan in East Jakarta, can hardly be called a river anymore since it now resembles a waste land with no water running through it. "The stench has actually lessened recently. It used to be much worse when the garbage really started to pile up," Tri said at her house, while chickens could be seen running on top of the river looking for food.

The Batu Ampar Subdistrict Leaders Forum (LMK) head, Sarikun, 50, said that the river had dried up because of the drought currently affecting the city. Initially, when the water was still running, the garbage only affected 50 meters of the river. Then, when the decrease of water flow failed to carry away the garbage, the clogged section of the river expanded to around 150 meters. As a result, the piles of garbage grew in size, said Sarikun.

To tackle this problem, Sarikun said, he would send garbage carts to take the waste to designated garbage disposal areas, where it would be removed by garbage trucks. "We can only use carts as the alleys leading to the river are too narrow for cars to pass, let alone garbage trucks," he said. Starting from Thursday, he said he would also cooperate with the East Jakarta Public Works Subagency to dredge the clogged river. "I'll try to solve this issue in two to three days," he said. "But the problem will persist if the residents here still act irresponsibly — by continuing to throw garbage into the river."

According to him, there are actually four designated garbage disposal spots around the subdistrict. "But the residents are in the habit of throwing their waste into the river and not into the designated spots," he said. "People passing through the streets that run alongside the river also throw garbage into it," he added. Another resident of Batu Ampar, 45-year-old Iwan, said that garbage collectors, who were supposed to pick up garbage throughout the neighborhood with carts, had not shown up to collect the residents' trash for several weeks.

"Therefore, most of us have to walk to the designated spots to dispose of our trash," he said. Sarikun said that the garbage collectors no longer wanted to work because the residents failed to pay the monthly service fee of Rp 5,000 (52 US cents). Disorganized waste management, coupled with uncontrollable illegal settlement along riverbanks throughout the city, has caused the rivers to be saturated with tons of garbage that leads to flooding during the rainy season. The most recent major flooding happened in 2007 and claimed the lives of 54 people.

To improve the quality of waterways in the city, the central government and the Jakarta administration will begin a five-year program in October to repair dikes and dredge 11 canals and four reservoirs. The program will have financial assistance from the World Bank. **(han)**