

Semarang city gets wider, cleaner rivers

Semarang municipality has a new look after the completion of projects to clean and widen the Kaligarang and West Flood Canal in December. The Rp 250 billion (US\$25.33 million) normalization project, which included building several recreational areas and landscaping, stretches 9.3 kilometers, from the Tugu Suharto monument in the city's south to the Bendung Simongan Dam in the north.

"The normalization was done by considering technical aspects, and supporting them with the development of facilities for public convenience," a field officer of the Banjir Kanal Barat normalization project, Anang Mukhlis, said earlier this week.

Anang said the project aimed to change the image of the area as a dirty place used to dump garbage. Work also included improvements to the rivers' drainage system to prevent floods, widening the rivers, building embankments and deepening the rivers.

The normalization program improved the capacity of the rivers from 300 to 400 cubic meters per second to 740 cubic meters per second, meaning that heavy rain that might have previously caused floods can be accommodated by the West Flood Canal.

The supporting recreational facilities that were built include a plaza and therapy facility at Bendung Simongan, an open stage at Kokroso and a jogging track at Bulu Drain Tanah Mas.

More than 100 decorative streetlights were installed along the banks of West Flood Canal, enlivening the scene at night, when the cleaner river waters reflect the colorful lights.

Other supporting projects under the normalization initiative included improvement of historical places along the river, such as the relatively unknown Japanese Memorial Park, which was built to commemorate the Japanese troops who died during a five-day battle in Semarang.

The area around the Tugu Suharto monument, which has been used by local residents for traditional Javanese New Year rituals, was also renovated.

Another museum is slated to be built nearby that would be about the Simongan Dam.

Local resident Siti Sofiah welcomed the normalization program, saying that she and her family were now able to spend their free time along the banks of the West Flood Canal to enjoy the scenery.

She had one piece of advice, however. "We need more garbage bins here so people will not easily litter." Separately, the head of the Jatibarang Dam development's particular non-vertical working unit, M. Mazid, said that despite its positive impact, the development of the facilities along the normalized rivers would also have a negative effect.

Among other detractions, he said, would be the reemergence of street vendors to an area that is supposed to be free from such activities.

"Synergy is needed between the administration, the people and the private sector for better preservation of river areas."