

Massive floods drown Medan

Massive flooding between 2 and 3 meters deep is affecting several districts in Medan, North Sumatra, engulfing thousands of homes and paralyzing traffic along a number of roads for at least four hours. No casualties have been reported in the flooding occurring since Thursday night, but a number of schools were forced to send students home because the schools were swamped by rising floodwaters. The Polonia Airport was also engulfed by floodwaters, especially around the runway, but airport authorities said the water had not disrupted flight schedules.

"There have been no disruptions. All activities in the airport remain safe. The pools of water have yet to disrupt flights," airport spokesperson Firdaus said Friday.

Heavy rains on Thursday night caused three rivers — the Babura, Deli and Belawan — to overflow and engulf thousands of homes in Simalingkar district, including the official residences of the governor, provincial police and military chiefs.

Thousands of cars and motorcycles were stuck in gridlock as floods swamped Jl. Dr. Mansur, Jl. Jamin Ginting, Jl. Juanda and Jl. Gaperta. Medan Polonia district resident Sani Tarigan said the floods were the worst he had seen. The 70-year-old resident said he had lived in the area for decades and for the first time had watched floodwaters engulf his home.

"I have been living here since 1950, but have only now seen more than 2 meters of floodwater enter my house," Sani said. Medan Mayor Rahudman Harahap said he had set an emergency response period for the disaster. He vowed to distribute food and other relief to homes affected by the floods.

"I will immediately channel aid to affected residents," he said. Jayapura, Papua, a legislator has asked the health and social services ministries to help victims of the floods in Paniai on March 17.

"The Papua provincial and Paniai regency administrations alone are not able to assist flood victims in Paniai and that is why we ask the central government to also deal with it because many of the residents are sick and their homes were swept away by floods," Papua legislative councillor Nason Uti, who was inspecting the flooding, told The Jakarta Post.

The floods since March 17 engulfed thousands of homes in Aradide and Ekadide districts, forcing residents to take shelter on higher ground.

"The floods have disrupted people's daily activities because they have to live in makeshift shelters and their children are not attending school as their schools are still swamped by floodwaters," Nason said.

Papua Disaster Mitigation Agency head Didi Prihatno said the floods in Paniai were annual.

"The Papua provincial administration, through the Social Services Office, will distribute relief aid on April 4, including food and tents, to evacuees staying in shelters who are waiting for the floods to recede before returning home," he said.