



W. Java to start restoring Citarum River from upstream section

Arya Dipa, The Jakarta Post, Bandung | Archipelago | Tue, November 12 2013, 11:31 AM

West Java Governor Ahmad Heryawan has called on all stakeholders to work together with the government in restoring the Citarum River following a report by an environmental organization, which listed the Citarum as one of the world's most polluted bodies of water. The restoration program will be carried out in an integrated and systematic manner from 2014 to 2018.

The restoration plan will start at the upstream section of the Citarum River, stretching 60 kilometers from the Cisanti catchment area, at the foot of Mount Wayang, south of Bandung city, down to the Saguling dam.

The damaged ecosystem has been attributed to waste disposal in the Citarum River, prompting environmental organization Green Cross Switzerland and international nonprofit group Blacksmith Institute to include the river and all the rivers in Kalimantan as polluted locations that are equivalent to Chernobyl in Ukraine.

In regards to the restoration program, Ahmad said his administration would focus on dealing with a 20-kilometers section of the river basin area in 2014.

"It will start from the upstream section at the Cisanti Reservoir," Ahmad said, adding that the 297-kilometers river supported 27 million people living in areas along the river basin.

The restoration program in 2015 will cover a 15-kilometers stretch of the river, in 2016 it will cover 10 kilometers and 5 kilometers in 2018, which will conclude at the Saguling dam.

Upstream areas, added Ahmad, were subjected to serious ecological problems, including environmental damage caused by industrial waste as well as pollution from households, livestock farms and soil erosion or surface runoff from sloping farmlands.

"We will begin in stages. We will seek funding from the state and provincial budgets," said Ahmad.

Based on mappings carried out by his administration, Ahmad said he would focus on reforesting critical areas at the Citarum River's upstream areas, while immediately addressing other issues, such as installing biogas processing facilities for cattle farms.

Currently, cattle farmers dump livestock waste directly into the Citarum River. The Bandung Regency Fishery and Husbandry Agency recorded 17,690 tons of cattle waste being dumped into the longest river in West Java.

“Besides that, the livestock farms will be relocated away from the river banks. Residents will not suffer, instead they will benefit from the relocation,” added Ahmad.

The third solution, added Ahmad, was curbing forest conversion. In the upstream areas, many farmers cultivate crops on areas with a slope of over 45 degrees, thus causing massive soil erosion.

Farmers who have been growing crops there use chemical fertilizers that can easily run off into the river when it rains, especially because many farms are at steep angles. Siltation, due to erosion, can potentially reduce the water volume of the three dams — Saguling, Cirata and Jatiluhur — located along the Citarum river delta.

For example, the Saguling dam is currently expected to last for only 25 to 50 years, while in fact the dam, which was built in 1985, was initially predicted to operate for 67 years. The decreasing lifespan of the dam may eventually interrupt the power supply for Java, Madura island in East Java and Bali.

Meanwhile, Citarum River Zone Center head Adang Saf said his office was responsible for handling the construction of 90 sediment control structures at the upstream areas.

“We have only built 31 units as of now. In 2014, 10 more units will be built. All of them will be built in stages,” Adang said.

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