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Indonesia hopes radars will improve weather forecasting

Alvin Darlanika Soedarjo and M. Taufiqurrahman, The Jakarta Post, Jakarta

Indonesia has developed an automatic weather radar system that provides real-time data to increase the accuracy of weather study in various fields, experts said Tuesday.

"The system can help the government create an operational system that monitors or predicts weather or climate conditions," said project leader Fadli Syamsuddin.

The system is called Harimau, which stands for Hydrometeorological Array for Intraseasonal variation Monsoon Automonitoring. It was jointly developed by the Agency for the Assessment and Application of Technology (BPPT) and the government of Japan.

Harimau examines variations between seasons and their relation to cloud-forming activity and rainfall in Indonesia. Data from the system can be used to create accurate forecasts. It can also factor into decisions on when to cultivate plants and how to manage transportation and water resources.

The Meteorology and Geophysics Agency, the National Aeronautics and Space Institute, the National Coordination Agency for Surveying and Mapping and the Maritime and Fishery Research Agency can also use data from the project.

The data can be publicly accessed at http://203.88.86.149/mia_xdr/index.html.

BPPT, with the help of expertise and a grant from Japan's Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology, built radars on the Tiku coast in Agam Regency and at Minangkabau International Airport in Padang Pariaman regency, both in West Sumatra, in July and October last year.

More radars are planned for Pontianak in West

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Kalimantan, Biak in Papua and Manado in North Sulawesi this year.

"The reason for building the radars on places along the equator is scientific, as the climate is hotter and the clouds are more likely to evaporate," Fadli told *The Jakarta Post*.

In light of the recent flooding, BPPT will also build an additional radar in Serpong, Banten, in June, to predict floods.

Each radar costs about U\$1 million to build, including an associated computer. The operational cost is about Rp 25 million (US\$2,700) per month for each station, Fadli said.

BPPT plans to keep collaborating with Japan, which is allocating \$2.5 million each year to the project, until March 2010.

In addition to this cooperative effort, BPPT Deputy Chairman of Technology for Natural Resources Development Jana Anggadiredja said Indonesia should develop its own model as the needs here were different from those in other countries.

In related news, State Minister for National Development Planning Paskah Suzetta estimated that aggregate losses from the recent flooding totaled Rp 4.1 trillion (US\$455 million).

"That includes the disruption of economic activities, and services that failed to reach the public," Paskah told reporters after a cabinet meeting Tuesday at the State Palace.

Greenomics Indonesia, however, estimated much higher losses of Rp 7.3 billion.

The executive director of Greenomics Indonesia, Elfian Effendi, said in a statement that the losses accounted for 1.7 percent of the capital's gross domestic product.

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