Earth and the ‘ecological’ credit card

The Jakarta Post  |  Sun, 06/19/2011 6:40 AM  |  Opinion

Yansen

We have witnessed several tragedies in banking sector in Indonesia lately. Irzen Octa, the holder of credit card issued by a multinational banking company, died while discussing his credit card bill with debt collectors.

Separately, Malinda Dee, a former Citibank employee, allegedly embezzled from her customers.

At the same time, our society has also been suffering from massive ecological calamities. Flash floods resulting from deforestation have become a never-ending story.

Ecosystem catastrophes as a result of poor mining practices are commonplace. People in Sidoarjo just marked five years of misery caused by the Lapindo mud tragedy.

There are clear signs that the balance of our natural ecosystem is in peril. The latest caterpillar population boom is also part of that indication. These are signs of significant disruptions to the natural processes.

Are these occurrences interconnected? There may not be a direct correlation. However, if we think about it, we will notice a similar paradigm supports both the banking sector tragedies and the ecosystem calamities.

The death of Octa reflected two things. First, when a person owes money they must pay for their current needs with future income. If the income is generated in the future, the debt can be paid. But if they fail to generate income, the result will be bad.

Second, we must beware of over consumption. Without strict regulations, and competition among banks to attract more customers, credit cards provide a perfect way to fuel a desire for consumption.

Uncontrolled spending could be the consequence. The tale of Malinda Dee may supports this hypothesis. She allegedly embezzled to pay for a luxurious lifestyle that she allegedly could not afford on her salary.

Nature operates under a similar principle. Consuming natural resources means spending our savings. The best way to spend should follow the use of a debit card: we spend what we have.

Unfortunately, the utilization of our precious natural resources in reality looks like the use of a credit card. With no long term perspective, utilization of natural wealth turns into over exploitation. We have to realize that all future savings that we currently consume must be covered by future profits.

Needless to say, the Earth is not an infinite resource. Natural resources will not last forever. When natural resources grow scarce it means that environmental carrying capacity is in danger.
Consequently, our capacity to pay back our debt to nature is also diminishing. In the end, we all may suffer misfortune like a bankrupt credit card customer. When over exploitation has become the main philosophy of natural resource utilization, the natural system will no longer be sustainable.

Ecosystem tragedies, such as massive flash flooding, mining tragedies and population explosions, are a sign of mismanagement of the environment.

The caterpillar population out-burst, for example, may not be due to a single factor, but it is a clear sign of a disruption in the ecosystem balance.

The loss of the natural predators of caterpillars, monoculture agriculture and the migration of moths due to forest destruction show that there are some problems in ecosystem management.

If this is the case, we may say that there was past exploitation of the environment which produced debts that have to be paid now. If we do not pay these natural debts, ecosystem balance is at risk. With more changes in the ecosystem and climate, environmental tragedies may occur more frequently.

This series of ecological tragedies should become a wake-up call. We must be aware that environment’s carrying capacity has been exceeded.

The absent of orientation to sustainably manage the ecosystem will result in an inability to pay back our future loans to nature.

The World Environment Day 2011 highlights the fact that nature has provided us with uncounted great services. We can continue utilizing those services if we spend them wisely and in an appropriate manner.

The natural savings must be prepared so we will have some money in the “nature bank” to be spent in future. Just like an old man who plants a tree; it is not for himself, but to benefit another generation.

David Suzuki said that the ecosystem crisis would have a significant impact on humanity’s well-being. The law of nature is much more powerful than economic interests. One thing is important, he added, we have to be united as a species to respond to current ecological problems.

The change has to begin with an individual with a full of imagination and belief to the generosity of nature.

The writer is an ecologist at the University of Bengkulu and an Australian Leadership Awards fellow.

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