

Bali to shut down over Nyepi



Hindus carry offerings during a Melasti procession at Padang Galak Beach in Denpasar, Bali, on Monday. The self-purifying ceremony served as a prelude to Nyepi (Day of Silence), which falls on Thursday.

The resort island of Bali is gearing up to take a break for 24 hours to observe Nyepi (Hindu Day of Silence) on Thursday. All visitors to the island are expected to respect the religious practice. The island of more than 4 million people will all but shut down from 6 a.m. Thursday to 6 a.m. the following day. All access to the predominantly Hindu island, including I Gusti Ngurah Rai Airport and all seaports, will be closed. No vehicles will be allowed on the streets except for emergency services.

Lights will also be turned off at night, except at certain public facilities such as hospitals and police stations. Hotels will be allowed to turn on minimum lighting and tourists will be confined to hotel compounds. All markets, shops, offices, cafes, bars, restaurants and other public spaces will be closed. People on the island are expected to refrain from using all forms of home entertainment, such as televisions, radios and the internet. "Although internet access will be cut off, internet services for vital installations and for public facilities such as hospitals, police stations, military offices, the disaster agency and the airport will still be allowed," Bali administration spokesperson Gede Darmawan said.

The Communication and Information Ministry has issued a letter to notify all internet providers to shut down internet services on the island that day. "By shutting down internet services, we hope Hindus will observe Nyepi solemnly," Darmawan said. Nyepi is a holy day that marks the beginning of the Hindu New Year according to the Saka calendar. Hindus mark the day by amati

geni (abstaining from lighting fires), amati karya (abstaining from work), amati lelungan (abstaining from venturing outside the family compound) and amati lelanguan (abstaining from enjoying entertainment).

Indonesian Hindu Religious Council (PHDI) Bali chairman IGN Sudiana said Nyepi was a time for Balinese Hindus to contemplate on how to be a better person in the new year. He explained that Nyepi was also a time for the universe to take a break. "It's time for the universe to be really tranquil." Sudiana said Nyepi made a positive contribution to humankind and nature. "We get to enjoy fresh air. We believe it offers tranquility and harmony with nature," he added. Bali Interfaith Communication Forum (FKUB) chairman Ida Penglingsir Agung Putra Sukahet said interfaith leaders in Bali had pledged to safeguard the day. "We hope all people of all religions in Bali will take part and support us in observing Nyepi. This is for nature as well. Let's give a break to our island," Sukahet said.

Abdul Kadir Makaramah of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) offered respect to those observing Nyepi. "We have to respect the holy days of all religions, including Hindu. We [Muslims in Bali] are ready to support them," he said. Thousands of Balinese Hindus flocked to beaches across the island earlier this week for the sacred Melasti purification ritual to cleanse the universe of "stains" and wash away the "dirtiness" of nature.