

Residents say no to PT Fathi exploration

Hundreds of residents of Praikarokujang subdistrict, Central Sumba regency, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), attacked workers at a mining site owned by PT Fathi Resources on Thursday afternoon in protest against exploration activities at the site. The residents used sharp weapons and stones in the attack. Heavy equipment used for mining exploration was also burnt.

Mine workers fled from the attackers into Manupeu Tana Daru National Park.

Central Sumba Deputy Regent Umbu Dondu confirmed the attack on Friday.

"We have received the report and have asked the police to provide security. The situation is under control but the police are still on guard to prevent further attacks," Umbu said.

He said PT Fathi was exploring the site for gold and manganese.

"If the study shows that mining is feasible then the company will ask for a license to move forward with the environmental impact analysis and other activities," he said.

Umbu denied accusations that the exploration was being conducted inside national park grounds, saying the site was a free zone and not part of the park according to the regency's spatial planning documents.

The regency administration has different data as to the borders of the site compared with national park management, he said.

"But, we have formed a verification team to conduct an investigation into the matter as soon as possible," Umbu said.

Activist Felipus Yanggu of the Central Sumba Environmental Care Forum said the attack was the result of residents' disappointment with the regency administration for ignoring their protest, submitted several days before, against exploration at the site.

"Residents have repeatedly protested the exploration activities but they received no response. This is what made them mad and caused them to commit the attack and burn the mining equipment," Felipus said.

Manupeu Tana Daru National Park head Kuppin Simbolon said that some of the drilling spots were indeed located inside the national park, including ones in the area of Palita Alira, Umbu Rau Nggay district.

He said his office once caught three PT Fathi employees taking mining samples from inside the national park. The three were arrested. Officials at the time also seized three cars, crowbars, shovels and samples of the materials excavated.

The national park covers 87,894 hectares, according to the Forestry Minister's decree in 1998.