

Govt to open forests for geothermal mining

The government will soon issue a presidential decree that would allow the development of geothermal resources located within protected forests, a senior official has said.

Forestry Minister Zulkifli Hasan said in Jakarta on Thursday that although the existing forestry law prohibited mining operations in protected forests, it provided ample room for the development of geothermal power stations.

“But the details of the rules have to be regulated through a presidential decree,” he added.

“Around 80 percent of our geothermal reserves are located in protected forests. We’re now waiting for the completion of a presidential decree on underground mining activities, because geothermal mining is included in that mining type,” he told reporters in his office in Jakarta as quoted by *detikfinance.com* news portal.

He said that geothermal mining activities were environmentally friendly, and therefore would not damage the forests.

“The presidential decree has been completed, but is still awaiting President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s signature,” Zulkifli said.

The government has reaffirmed its commitment to develop geothermal energy to reduce the nation’s dependency on oil-based fuels. Global crude oil prices are now poised at about US\$92 per barrel.

The country’s oil reserves are estimated to run out in about 18 years.

Indonesia has made little progress in tapping its alternative energy potentials.

Oil-based fuels still dominate the country’s energy production, representing 54.4 percent of the total energy consumption, followed by natural gas at 26.5 percent and coal at 14.1 percent, according to the National Development Planning Board.

Alternative energies, including geothermal and hydroelectric, represent 5 percent of the country’s total consumption.

The Directorate General for New Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation at the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry announced in a press statement that the development projects of 43 geothermal power plants with a total capacity of 3,967 megawatts were ready to begin in the near future.

The projects are part of the second phase of the government’s 10,000-megawatt fast-track program, launched to stave off a looming nation-wide power deficit.

The directorate general says that the projects will be located in several places from Aceh to North Maluku. In Sumatra, for example, the power plants will be built in Jaboi in Aceh, Sarulla in North Sumatra, Muaralaboh in West Sumatra, Lumut Balai in South Sumatra and Rajabasa in Lampung.

Indonesia, home to hundreds of active and extinct volcanoes, is estimated to have a geothermal potential of around 28,000 megawatts, or 40 percent of the world’s potential.