

Mining companies urged to respect people, environment

Students in Mataram held a demonstration at the legislative council building on Monday to oppose mining practices that disregarded public interests and the environment. The rally was joined by around 60 students who claimed to be members of the Anti-Mining Students' Alliance (AMANAT).

"We are calling on the government to revoke mining licenses for companies whose existence disadvantages the people," rally coordinator Maskur said.

Maskur pointed to the recent clashes between local residents and security personnel in Bima regency over the disputed mining practices of PT IMCP in Lambu district and PT SMN in Parado district. The residents claimed that the companies had infringed upon agricultural and plantation areas.

"The companies have been working on around 38,000 hectares of the people's paddy fields and plantations. When the people demanded them back, they were instead given gunshots," Maskur said.

The students accused the government of granting work permits to companies without considering public interests. They urged councilors to listen to their aspirations and told the government to revoke disputed mining permits. The demonstrators failed to meet with legislators, who were reportedly in a meeting to listen to the governor's accountability report.

The protesters attempted to blockade the street but were dispersed by police personnel.

The students also encouraged the local government to acquire divestment shares offered by PT Newmont Nusa Tenggara.

The local government has insisted on taking the shares, which the company has instead offered to the central government.

"The Earth's wealth should be enjoyed by the people, so the shares should go to local government," Maskur said.

Another group of students criticized the government for what they called poor performance. They held placards reading "Red Rapport".

"We are demanding the governor and deputy governor to fulfill their campaign promises from the 2008 election. They promised, and they betray us," coordinator Suhaimi said.

He said Regent Zainul Majdi and Deputy Regent Badrul Munir had promised to support medical services, provide free education and develop more balanced infrastructure between Lombok and Sumbawa.

The local government has apparently been campaigning for free education services for as long as 12 years.

"The fact is that only registration fees are exempted. The students are still required to pay for books and building fees," he said.