

SBY still pondering planned forest moratorium

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was still studying the concept of a forest moratorium before signing a presidential instruction as a legal instrument to stop the conversion of forest areas. Forestry conversion in Indonesia still measures about 1 million hectare a year. After a month-long delay, it remains unclear whether the forest moratorium would be imposed or not.

“The President still needs to learn the [moratorium] concept better,” said Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, head of the taskforce charged with reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD).

Kuntoro said that his taskforce had submitted a draft of “presidential instructions” to the President, equipped with 219 forestry maps of areas where conversion should be barred.

“Concepts from the REDD taskforce are that the forest moratorium would be implemented in all types of forests, from primary, natural to peatland across the country,” he said.

A forest moratorium pilot project, a partnership with the Norwegian government, would be run in Central Kalimantan this year. The US\$1 billion climate change deal with Norway required the Indonesian government to stop forest loss within two years starting Jan. 1, 2011. Indonesia has received US\$30 million as an initial payment to prepare institutions needed to implement the forest moratorium.

The government, however, has not issued any legal instruments or guidelines to help local administrations stop deforestation.

Kuntoro admitted that there were a number of versions of “presidential instruction drafts”, including from the Forestry Ministry office.

“It is, however, natural since each sector has its own perceptions [of the forest moratorium],” he said.

The Forestry Ministry disagreed that the forest moratorium would cover all types of forests in Indonesia, saying it would only hamper economic growth in the country.

“If a moratorium is made in all forests, it would damage economic growth. We still need more space to use forests for the welfare of the people,” Tachrir Fathony, head of research and development unit at the ministry, told *The Jakarta Post* on Friday.

He said the Forestry Ministry wanted the moratorium to only be implemented in primary forest and peatland areas.

“We have submitted the map with total area of 61 million hectares of primary forest and peatland that could be barred from conversion activities. It is already half of the country’s forest,” he said.

Greenpeace expressed concern over the delay of the forest moratorium. Greenpeace also urged business players to stop undermining the President’s commitment to protecting forests, and called for the immediate protection of all peatlands and a temporary halt on clearance of all natural forestland, both within new and existing concession areas.

The organization said that the moratorium would create an incentive for industry to dramatically increase productivity within existing plantation areas.