

Riau urged to ratify spatial plan to boost development

A number of cross-ethnic and professional leaders have founded the Riau People's Movement (Gerak) forum to urge the central government to immediately ratify the Riau Spatial Plan (RTRW), which for the past year has remained stuck in the Forestry Ministry.

Riau Gerak head Yusmar Yusuf, who is also a professor at Riau University, said the RTRW urgently needed ratification to ensure economic and infrastructure development, especially in isolated areas – currently stifled by the lack of a regulation on what areas could be used for what.

“Many development projects have been hampered due to the pending RTRW. The draft RTRW was submitted to the Forestry Ministry around 18 months ago but it has yet to be approved,” said Yusmar. Leaders in the forum had met and held discussions last week, he continued, but the forestry minister was still unwilling to endorse the Riau RTRW.

Riau Chamber of Commerce deputy head Viator Butarbutar said the deadlock was negatively affecting the investment climate in Riau. He also said that over the past few years, many investors interested in Riau had abandoned plans to invest due to legal uncertainty surrounding the RTRW.

Nearly 80 percent of the land in Riau is zoned as forest, though much of that been turned into office, business and residential areas.

“Not only are regency and municipal [buildings] still categorized as forests, but also the Riau governor's office because the RTRW has yet to be approved,” Viator said.

“This problem has been there for a long time, but it has not yet been addressed by the central government.” Land disputes between the community and companies, he went on, were due in part to the unresolved Riau RTRW.

“Members of the community receive land and titles officially from the village chief, but when they start to cultivate the land, a company appears and claims it has obtained a concession permit from the central government. Such cases are common and many residents have been sent to prison although they bought the land legally,” said Viator.

He cited the Pekanbaru-Dumai toll road project, which was planned nine years ago, but has failed to be realized due to the pending RTRW. A release permit for a stretch of the road has yet to be released by the Forestry Ministry despite being approved by an integrated team from the ministry, which had also recommended a changing the zoning of forested areas in 2012.

To draw the attention of the central government, Riau Gerak will mobilize hundreds of people from several different ethnic communities to join a rally and urge the Riau legislative council to immediately move for the ratification of the RTRW.

Committee head of the Riau Malay Traditional Institution Al Azhar has even threatened to mobilize Riau residents to boycott the presidential election on July 9 should the central government fail to follow through on the provincial RTRW.