

Greater effort needed to oppose Benoa Bay reclamation

Customary villages, members and leaders of communities have been called on to stage major protests against the planned massive project to reclaim Benoa Bay to make way for the development of world-class entertainment and tourist-related facilities.

Huge posters and banners are being placed in villages adjacent to Benoa Bay urging the Bali provincial government and investors to stop their development plans.

Initiated by ForBali, which stands for Forum Rakyat Bali Tolak Reklamasi (Balinese Forum Against Reclamation), hundreds of community members, NGOs, university students as well as musicians staged a rally at Puputan Renon public park on Friday morning.

Carrying posters and banners with bold designs and colors, the protesters started their speeches saying that the reclamation project, supported by the Bali government and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's administration, would badly affect the living conditions of the local people, as well as the environment.

"We need a more concerted effort and movement to act against the investor's plan," said a representative from the group. Nyoman Wada, a resident of Kelan village in Benoa and chair of Benoa Fishermen's Club, said his village was located near Benoa Bay.

"We will be the first village to be affected by any natural disaster when the reclamation takes place," Wada said.

PT Tirta Wahana Bahari International (TWBI) had earlier proposed the reclamation of the Benoa Bay conservation area covering around 838 hectares. The company commissioned a team from Udayana University to conduct a study on the project that found it unfeasible. Another study conducted by Conservation International (CI) also revealed that the planned project would cause environmental disasters, including flooding.

Located under the jurisdiction of Badung and Denpasar, Benoa Bay has a bright business future. Despite the numerous protests, President Yudhoyono issued Presidential Regulation No. 51/2014, which permitted the reclamation.

The regulation has twisted spatial planning by redesignating Benoa Bay as a business site from previously being designated as an environmental buffer zone and green-belt area.

I Wayan "Gendo" Suardana, coordinator of ForBali, said villagers and community leaders should put up a strong front against reclamation.

"It was such a pity that SBY [President Yudhoyono] issued the presidential regulation in the last months of his tenure to smoothe this reclamation project," Gendo said. A business tycoon reportedly owns PT TWBI.

Numerous artists grouped under Nosstress and the Bull Head performed with their bands, voicing their protests against the reclamation, the government and the investor.

Posters voiced people's aspirations in creative ways. One poster designer, Alit Ambara, created a huge poster that said "Batalkan Perpres 51/2014" (revoke Presidential Regulation No 51/2014).

Students from the Indonesian Hindu Institute (UNHI) in Denpasar performed a kecak dance that told the story of the fight against the reclamation.