

## **Opposition to Benoa reclamation project strengthens**

The middle-aged Putu Puspawati proudly and bravely carried a large banner claiming Kedonganan residents were against the Benoa Bay land reclamation project. "Finally, I can vent my aspirations to reject any plan for reclamation at Benoa Bay," Puspawati said.

"Previously, we had no 'captain' to command our actions because most government officials are two-faced," she added.

Here in Kedonganan, Puspawati said, the businesses belonged to the community.

"Local residents manage tourism activities, seafood restaurants and cafes. The planned reclamation of Benoa Bay would certainly have a tremendous negative impact on our small-scale businesses," she said.

If approved, the Benoa Bay development plan would only offer business opportunities to large-scale investors.

Together with 100 Kedonganan residents, she took part in a peaceful rally Sunday morning along Jl. Toyaning, leading to Benoa Square. Those taking part in the rally dressed in traditional Balinese clothes.

The rally was organized by Forum Pemerhati Pembangunan Bali (FPPB — Forum to Monitor Bali's Development).

The local people installed three huge banners in three different locations — on Jl. Toyaning, Jl. Bypass Ngurah Rai and at the entrance to Benoa Square, all conveying their strong rejection of the planned project.

Meanwhile, at the entrance to Benoa Square, dozens of youths flew huge kites that functioned as flying banners rejecting the project.

The opposition of the Kedonganan residents to the Benoa Bay reclamation has added to the numerous community groups and NGOs also against the project.

Environmental activists, community groups, academics and legislators have voiced a range of concerns over the reclamation at Benoa Bay, which has recently had the nod from President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono under the revision of the spatial master plan for Denpasar, Badung, Gianyar and Tabanan.

The rejections are based on environmental, economic, social and cultural grounds.

"Fishermen living in south Bali will not have access to the reclaimed area in Benoa Bay. It will likely be closed and focused on giving space to big business. They [big investors] will likely build tourist facilities with perfect sites and views, while local residents will bear the environmental burden," said I Gede Sudiana, chair of FPPB Kedonganan.

Ecologically, the planned reclamation could disrupt the water flow of five rivers, causing serious flooding in nearby villages.

"We experienced this [flooding] during the reclamation project to make way for Ngurah Rai International Airport," said I Dewa Ketut Subaima, the forum's secretary.

Kedonganan district head, I Nyoman Sudarta, commented that as a government official he would not take sides.

The protesters urged him to channel their aspirations to Badung Regent AA Agung Gde Agung.

"We are now preparing a letter for President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to stop any efforts to reclaim Benoa Bay," the protesters claimed.