

Govt urged to revoke SMN's mining license in Bima

Students and environmental activists took to the streets in Mataram on Wednesday to call for an end to PT Sumber Mineral Nusantara's (SMN) gold mining operation in the wake of a recent deadly protest over a land dispute between the company and local residents.

They urged the governor to cancel the mining permit granted by Bima regent under decree No. 188/2010. The grant drew opposition from local residents whose protest at Sape seaport in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, on Dec. 24 was violently dispersed by the police. Two of the protesters were found dead in the aftermath.

"We want the governor as the extended hands of the central government to revoke the Bima regent's decree. The decree has become the source of the problem that triggered the Sape incident at Lambu district, Bima," Eduardus Suparto, rally coordinator, said on Wednesday.

The protesters also called for a quick report on the investigation into the Sape violence.

Eduardus said that the farmers' resistance to the mining operation had been shown as early on as the decree's first issuance in 2010.

"The residents in Sape and Lambu are farmers by profession. They need land and irrigation. They don't need mining that only destroys the environment," he said.

PT SMN is one of more than 20 mining companies in operation in Bima.

PT SMN's general manager Sucipto Maridjan said in a statement on Wednesday that the Bima regent's decision to temporarily stop his firm's exploration activities could have a negative impact on the investment realization of the local mining industry, and also the continuity of exploration activities in Bima.

Sucipto said that his company had spent between US\$1 million and \$2 million on exploration from 2008 to 2011.

"If the exploration activities go on as expected, our entire spending in 2011 is expected to have reached \$3 million," he said.

"We hope that we can continue our exploration activities in line with our obligations as a holder of the mining license, which should provide the relevant assurances for us, as a company that seriously and sincerely wants to realize its activities," Sucipto said.

He explained that it was still unclear when the firm's exploration activities would begin to yield results, adding that it was difficult to know whether there actually were gold deposits in the area.

"The risk is very high as out of the 200 working contracts issued by the government in 1986, less than 10 firms realized their mining plans," he said.