

Coal exports risk biodiversity of Kalimantan, say activists

Environmental activists urged the government to drop its plan to boost coal exports from Kalimantan, as it would not only contribute to greater carbon emissions but would endanger the island's biodiversity.

A recent report released by Greenpeace entitled "Point of No Return" shows that the country's plan to massively expand coal exports from Kalimantan, which would add 460 million tons of carbon dioxide a year by 2020, would bring serious harm to local tropical forests.

Greenpeace Indonesia climate and energy campaigner Arif Fiyanto said that Indonesia would rank number four in the world's carbon dioxide emission polluters in 2020, should the government press ahead with its plan to increase coal production to 500 million tons per year.

The country ranked number 12 in 2008.

"Indonesia produced around 390 million tons of coal last year and the country has claimed the title as the world's top coal producer since 2011. Ironically, the country has only 3 percent of the total world coal reserves," Arif said in a press conference on Monday.

Kahar Al Bahri, the coordinator of Mining Networks (Jatam) said that Kalimantan was now a big mess of mining activities.

Kahar said East Kalimantan had only 19.8 million hectares of land, but local governments had granted licences, mainly to mining and plantation companies, for an area of 21.7 million hectares.

"More people in Kalimantan will lose their homes if the government allows the expansion of coal production. More people will lose their jobs as well," he said.

He said that intensified mining activities could also cause social problems.

Kahar added that more and more Kalimantan residents relied on the coal mining industry for their livelihoods, without realizing that coal reserves would only last another 20 years.

Kahar said the revenue from coal contributed little to the development of local communities.

He said that the total coal production in Kalimantan was around 265 million tons last year, more than 70 percent of the country's total coal production.

"Sadly, 82 percent of coal production is for the foreign market and is not being used to develop Kalimantan. In addition, we still have to deal with a serious electricity shortage," he said.

He said that environmental disasters caused by mining activities in Kalimantan would leave permanent damage as Kalimantan had no volcanoes that could help fertilize the land.

"For every million tons of coal exported from Kalimantan, the island loses the exact same amount of soil," he said.

Arif said that the only way to rein in coal production was by issuing a regulation that would reduce coal production and promote the use of renewable energy.

Data from the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry said that renewable sources would only contribute less than 5 percent of the country's energy sources, with the rest coming from fossil fuels.

"The country should look into developing its geothermal and solar power, and not shifting from oil and gas to coal to produce electricity," he said. (nad)