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Indon-Sand

SAND EXPORTS TO M'SIA TO RAISE FUNDS FOR ELECTIONS, GROUP CLAIMS

By: Openg Onn Net

JAKARTA, Nov 18 (Bernama) - An Indonesian environmental group, the Indonesian Forum for Environment (Walhi-Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia) has accused the planned sand exports to Malaysia as part of a certain local political party's scheme to raise funds for its campaign in next year's general elections.

Walhi Executive Director Longgena Ginting, who refused to reveal the political party concerned, said the non-governmental body was opposed to the proposal as it would damage the marine environment in Riau Province where the sand would be extracted from.

"We know that this is part of the scheme linked with a political party to raise funds for the 2004 general elections," she said, adding that Walhi had collected the signatures of some 50,000 Riau residents who objected to the proposed resumption of marine sand exports.

Longgena said that Walhi would send the petition containing the signatures to the Government which was contemplating exporting sand to Malaysia.

The petition would also be addressed to the Minister of Trade and Industries, Rini Soewandi, and State Minister of the Environment, Nabil Makarim, who had prior to this expressed their objections to the exports, she said.

Environmental activists had also opposed the sand exports to Malaysia fearing that it might end up in Singapore which badly required the material for its massive land reclamation projects along several stretches of its coasts.

Malaysia's Ambassador to Indonesia, Datuk Hamidon Ali, had last week dismissed the suggestion saying that the planned sand imports from Indonesia would be used for its land reclamation projects in Melaka and Tanjung Pelepas Port in Johor.

Singapore had for years carried out its land reclamation with sea sand from Riau, which environmentalists accused of being purchased through questionable exporters.

The Indonesian Government has since February this year put a temporary stop to sand extraction from Riau.

The sand exports became a hot issue, when early last month Marine and Fisheries Minister Rukhmin Dahuri met with former Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, during the ASEAN Summit in Bali, to discuss the possibility of exporting sand to Malaysia.

The proposal, had it materialised, would among others be carried out on a Government-to-Government basis and under a transparent system where the volume of extraction would be made known to the public.

-- BERNAMA

OPP AHH SRI