

Conflict Mapping in the Rempang Eco City National Strategic Project on Rempang Island Batam City

Edi Putra¹, Eki Darmawan²

¹ Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji, Jl. Raya Dompok, Kota Tanjungpinang, Provinsi Kepulauan Riau.

Corresponding Author: 2500030003@student.umrah.ac.id

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Abstract: The planned development of the Rempang Eco City (REC) National Strategic Project (PSN) in Rempang, Batam, continues to face resistance from many members of the Rempang indigenous community. This resistance has sparked conflict between the community and the Batam Free Trade Zone Authority (BP Batam), the Batam City Government, and PT MEG as the developer. Issues regarding customary land and agrarian affairs often trigger conflicts in regional development. This study aims to examine and map the sources of conflict and the parties responsible for the Rempang conflict. The theory used in this study is a decentralization and conflict approach. This study employed a qualitative method with a descriptive qualitative research design, which objectively and in detail describes the conflict that occurred on Rempang Island. Data collection techniques included a literature review of legislation, scientific journals, articles, news reports, press releases, and other documents relevant to the research topic, supported by field interviews. The results of this study conclude that there are three main factors that constitute the source of conflict: first, historical factors, culture, customs, and customary land. Second, factors of coercion and repressive actions by law enforcement officers, as well as criminalization, thuggery, and intimidation by BP Batam and the company. This factor also contributes to the escalating conflict over the PSN REC. Third, the Batam Free Trade Zone Authority's (BP Batam) non-humanistic and non-harmonious approach to the Rempang community. Several parties consider the source of this conflict to be the responsibility of BP Batam, the Regional Governments: Batam City Government, Riau Islands Provincial Government, Batam City Council (DPRD) and Riau Islands Provincial Council (DPRD), the Central Government: the President, the Ministry of Investment and the Ministry of Economy, and the company: PT MEG.

Keyword: Batam Business Agency, Rempang Eco City Conflict, Ex officio Head of BP Batam.

INTRODUCTION

In principle, conflict is something that is always present and difficult to separate from social life. Social conflict indicates the existence of disputes, debates, tensions, or disagreements that arise due to differences in social life, both among individuals and groups (1). The National Strategic Project (PSN) Development Plan for Rempang Eco City on Rempang Island has caused conflict regarding land use which violates the traditional rights of the indigenous people of Rempang Island, especially their land rights (2). The conflict between the indigenous people of Rempang Island, also known as the traditional village of the Malay community in Riau Province, and the local government began in 2004. This conflict began with the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the development of Rempang Island into an industrial and tourism center. The agreement was signed between PT MEG and the Batam City Government, the Batam City Council (DPRD), and the Batam Business Agency (BP Batam) under the name Exclusive Integrated Tourism Area (KWTE). However, its construction was suspended due to allegations of corruption and was then resumed under the name Rempang Eco

City (REC) in 2023. (3). There are sixteen old villages of local residents of Rempang Island, including: Tanjung Kertang, Rempang Cate, Tebing Tinggi, Blongkeng, Monggak, Pasir Panjang, Melayu Beach, Tanjung Kelinking, Sembulang, Dapur Enam, Tanjung Banun, Sungai Raya, Sijantung, Air Lingka, Kampung Baru and Tanjung Pengapit (4). Since its inception, the PSN REC conflict has attracted public attention, both locally, nationally, and internationally, making this issue crucial to further explore.

Rempang, part of the administrative area of Batam City, was established through Law No. 53 of 1999 (5). The Head of BP Batam, who also serves as the Mayor of Batam (ex officio), responded to this development plan as part of the support and orders of the president, which then became his duties, workload, responsibility and authority through the delegation of the ex officio position (6). Through Government Regulation Number 62 of 2019, strengthening the position of BP Batam as ex officio mayor of Batam in carrying out development in the Batam area including the PSN REC project on Rempang Island (7). However, this regulation has also contributed to the overlapping authority of the Batam City Government ex officio. In a 2018 limited cabinet meeting, the central government stated in a press release that the ex officio authority of the Batam BP was a solution and an effort to avoid dual leadership between the Batam City Government and the Batam BP in managing the Batam area (8). This Government Regulation (PP) clearly contradicts Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government (President of the Republic of Indonesia, 2014) and Law Number 25 of 2009 concerning Public Services. (9), which prohibits dual positions for state officials and public service providers, particularly regional heads. This overlapping authority renders the Batam mayor's position less independent in carrying out his duties as regional head. The ex officio authority granted to the Batam mayor has the potential to result in discretionary decisions that benefit groups or individuals, given that the Batam Free Trade Zone Authority (BP Batam) is a profit-oriented agency or organization (fiscal and economic development).

Previously, BP Batam itself had internally prohibited the head of BP Batam as a BP Batam official from becoming or holding the position of regional head, as regulated in the Batam KPBPB Council Regulation Number 1 of 2004 (10). However, with the enactment of several new regulations, these legal consequences appear to be nullified. Batam City, as an autonomous region, has the right and obligation to protect and manage its regional affairs, including development. In the context of decentralization, the Mayor of Batam can make decisions regarding the cancellation or rejection of projects that require community relocation, village evictions, and the mapping of new areas for the National Recreation and Conservation (PSN REC) project.

The PSN REC planning has had significant social impacts on the community and regional instability in Batam City. Since the program's launch and the mapping and marking of Rempang Island began, various dynamics within the community have rapidly and significantly evolved. Demonstrations by community groups, clashes between Rempang residents and security forces, and even brutal attacks on civilians have occurred several times. The Rempang community has strongly rejected and expressed its disagreement with the development plan for several reasons, including: First, Rempang is an ancient village or in other words a traditional village (old village) that has existed since the time of the kingdom in the Riau Islands, long before Indonesia's independence (11). Second, the residents of Rempang Island who have settled on Rempang Island, which is estimated to have been there long before the 1840s (12), leaving many cultural and historical traces in the form of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage (13) This situation then became another reason why the Rempang people were reluctant to leave the Rempang area. Third, from an economic perspective, the Rempang community is reluctant to move because it would require them to find new livelihoods with characteristics different from their previous area. This results in the community losing their living

space (14). Furthermore, the Rempang community was forced to accept the demolition of their houses and buildings and allow the Batam BP Agency to take over their land (15).

Based on the background description above, the main problem in this article is the conflict between the community and the Batam Free Trade Zone Authority (BP Batam) in the planning of the PSN REC development. The purpose of this study is to map the source of the conflict and the parties involved and responsible for the conflict

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method with a descriptive qualitative research design, which objectively and in detail described the conflict that occurred on Rempang Island. Data collection techniques employed a literature study technique, obtained from regulations from both central and regional governments, scientific journals, articles, news reports, press releases, and other documents relevant to the research topic, supported by field interviews. Literature study itself is an effort to collect data and sources regarding the topic taken in a research. Furthermore, literature study is a series of data collection activities, reading, and then processing research materials without direct fieldwork (16).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Historical Value, Disagreement and Agreement as Factors Causing Conflict in the PSN REC Project

As an area with long historical value and deep culture, Kampung Tua in Batam City has become the center of attention for many people, including history lovers. Rempang is one of the areas in Batam City designated as an old village, a cultural heritage site that must be protected by the Batam City government, as stipulated in Batam City Regional Regulation Number 2 of 2004 concerning the Batam City Spatial Planning Plan for 2004-2014 (17). This regulation states that the Cultural Heritage Area as referred to consists of Historical and Cultural Heritage Areas, and Old Villages. Another article states that Old Villages are groups of houses that served as residential areas for the indigenous population of Batam City before 1970, when Batam was first developed. These houses contain historical, cultural, and/or religious values that must be protected and preserved. Although this regulation is no longer used as the primary reference since the issuance of Batam City Regulation Number 3 of 2021 (18), However the Rempang community, based on its social and historical values, still recognizes Rempang as a cultural heritage, specifically an old village, that must be protected, even though it is no longer mentioned in the regulation. Meanwhile, in the new regional regulation, articles related to cultural heritage, including the protection of old villages, have been removed.

Therefore, based on the development of research findings by collecting relevant sources and data, as well as an in-depth and objective study, four factors were identified as sources of conflict in the National Strategic Project (PSN) REC in Batam City. This study was further supported by interviews with Deputy III of the Batam Business Entity Agency and representatives of community groups supporting the Rempang movement. This conflict is unavoidable due to the difficult-to-resolve conflict of interests between those in power and those in Rempang who are not, as explained by Ralf Dahrendorf (11). The research findings include: First, historical factors; when the PSN REC development plan was announced and began to be followed up, it required the developer company and BP Batam to take over community land, through various processes including eviction and relocation of community settlements to new locations. The community was forced to leave the Rempang area where they were born, raised, and cultivated the traditional values of their ancestors there since the time of the Malay kingdom. The Rempang community feels they have full rights to the customary land they have occupied. This long historical and historical value is also the basis and main

reason for the rejection of the PSN REC project by the Rempang community, in addition to being strengthened by historical traces and historical relics on Rempang Island.

Second, the conflict between the community and the PSN REC project organizers, including the conflict against BP Batam, is increasingly widespread and growing due to acts of thuggery, terror, threats, intimidation, and acts of physical violence experienced by the Rempang community which are acknowledged to originate from BP Batam in this case the BP Batam security unit, the involvement of the TNI/Polri, and other violence which is strongly suspected to be a company envoy to seize the Rempang area. This was obtained by researchers based on information from representatives of groups claiming to defend the Rempang community movement who are members of the Malay Youth Alliance (APM). In addition, the community is increasingly strong in defending their customary land followed by several incidents that are considered unfair and inhumane, including: the existence of community land markers that were unilaterally installed at several points in the Rempang area after the Rempang community demonstration on August 23, 2023 at the BP Batam office. Then there was the tragedy of gross human rights violations on September 7, 2023, which sparked condemnation and became the center of attention of various human rights observers, both regionally, nationally and internationally (19), where as many as 1010 personnel consisting of Satpol PP, Ditpam, Polda Kepri, Sat Brimob Polda Kepri, Polresta Bareleng, TNI AD and TNI AL (20) deployed by BP Batam to secure the installation of land stakes, which resulted in a violent clash between officers and Rempang residents. Tragically, this incident resulted in injuries to residents, trauma, and fear among schoolchildren who heard and witnessed gunfire and tear gas. Then, the arrest of 43 residents on charges of being provocateurs by police during a demonstration on September 11, 2023, at the BP Batam Building. In addition, there was an attack on residents' posts in Sembulang Hulu Village and Sei Buluh Village on December 17-18, 2024, by dozens of unknown individuals who were strongly suspected of being company representatives, which resulted in eight Rempang residents being injured as a result of the incident (21). Third, there is no certainty from BP Batam regarding the sustainability of customary land and historical heritage in Rempang, and there is no harmonious approach from BP Batam to the Rempang community.

Therefore, the community considers that the implementation of the PSN REC project is only for the benefit of companies, capital owners, political elites, and the interests and investment profits of BP Batam alone without paying attention to and considering the customs of the community.. Fourth, compensation for land, buildings and low living costs and unsuitable relocation locations. The government promises compensation to the community directly affected by the eviction and relocation in the form of new residences (areas) and new type 45 houses worth Rp 120,000,000 and monthly living costs (6 to 7 months) of Rp 1,200,000 which will be given to each person on one Family Card (KK) (22). The location, houses and costs provided by BP Batam as well as compensation for eviction and land takeover are considered not in accordance with the selling value of assets owned by the community (property and land area) and long-term living needs.

Although the REC project claims to prioritize local labor, this doesn't mean the Rempang community fully approves of the development. This claim was made directly in an interview with Mr. Sudirman Saad, Deputy III of the Batam Free Trade Zone Management Agency (BP Batam), who oversees the area's management and investment.:

“While there were some obstacles in the past, the development of Rempang must continue. We guarantee that 100 percent of the jobs in the PSN REC project will involve and employ the local Rempang community.”(23/05/2023).

According to Deputy III, the planning and accelerated implementation of the National Strategic Project (PSN) REC are in accordance with regulations and the authority of the Batam Free Trade Zone Authority (BP Batam), the agency responsible for the project. He assured that ex officio and

potential conflicts at the time would only require an appropriate approach to the community and would not result in overlapping authority of the Batam Free Trade Zone Authority (BP Batam).

In its planning, the PSN REC development was stated to be aimed at regional economic development and development that would impact the community's economy. The Batam City Government, as an extension of the central government, should have taken over some of the Batam Free Trade Zone Authority (BP Batam)'s role in developing and strengthening the community's economy, based on the city government's own policies based on regional autonomy rights. However, in the PSN REC planning process, BP Batam completely took over the project.

By strengthening the devolution and implementation of decentralization, this can minimize the potential for overlapping regional development implementation. The implementation of the Batam City Government's full decentralized powers significantly impacts the community's economy. BP Batam's involvement in the REC project eliminates crucial functions of the Batam City Government as an autonomous region. This decentralization empowers the Batam City Government to make decisions quickly and accurately to respond to problems and public affairs faced by the community. In addition, it can carry out crucial government functions, namely playing the role and responsibilities of government as stated in the state constitution for the community at the regional level so that the presence of government can be felt more clearly. This aligns with the statement by Barrett, Mude, and Omiti, who emphasized that the transfer of authority under decentralization is a package consisting of administrative decentralization, political decentralization, and fiscal decentralization. These three categories make decentralization a systemic and comprehensive managerial approach to strengthening the flexibility of lower-level governments in realizing governance oriented toward empowering local communities (23).

Legal Basis of BP Batam and the Authority of the Head of BP Batam in Managing PSN REC

BP Batam was given the authority and right to manage the Rempang area as a national strategic area based on several laws and regulations, including Presidential Decree No. 41 of 1973 concerning the Batam City Industrial Area, which aims to accelerate the improvement and development of Batam City as an industrial area. Based on this Presidential Decree, all land areas located on Batam Island were handed over, with management rights, to the Chairman of the Batam Island Industrial Area Development Authority. Then, Government Regulation No. 46 of 2007 concerning the Batam Free Trade Area and Free Port (24). Through this Government Regulation, the development of the Batam industrial area by the Batam Authority was subsequently handed over to the Batam Development Authority (BP Batam), automatically changing the status of the Batam Authority to BP Batam. Furthermore, Government Regulation Number 62 of 2019 amends and revises PP/46/2007 (7). This PP also includes the ex officio appointment of the Batam BP. The Batam PBPB Regional Council then established Regulation Number 1 of 2025 concerning the Organization and Work Procedures of the Batam KPBPB Management Agency, which states that the Head of the Batam BP, including the Deputy Head of the Batam BP, are appointed from among the Mayor and Deputy Mayors of Batam, who serve ex officio (25). From these various legal regulations, the basis and foundation as well as the legal power of BP Batam have the rights and authority to manage the Rempang area.

Legal Basis for PT MEG's Rights to Develop and Manage PSN REC

PT MEG has the authority over the management rights of the Rempang area since its implementation and was agreed upon through an MoU between BP Batam (the Batam authority at that time) with PT MEG, and the Batam City Government regarding the management of Rempang which was implemented in 2004 based on notarial deed number 65 dated August 26, 2004. Based on this agreement, PT MEG was given the rights and authority to manage Rempang into an industrial area.

Through the MoU, it means that PT MEG obtained permission from the Batam City Government and BP Batam. Then the Decree of the Mayor of Batam Number: KPTS.105 / HK / III / 2004 concerning the Implementation of the Old Village Area in Batam City which lists 13 old village points in the Rempang (Galang) area and Batam City Regional Regulation Number 2 of 2004 concerning the Batam City RTRW for 2004-2014 (17). The Mayor's Decree and Batam City Regulation still provide legal protection for the old villages in the Rempang area, until it was finally changed to Batam City Regulation Number 3 of 2021 concerning the Batam City RTRW for 2021-2041 (18), based on this new Regulation which ultimately weakens the position and existence of these old village areas. Furthermore, there is approval from the central government in this case through the Ministry of Economy which is marked by the launch of the first implementation of the PSN REC program in 2023. So this also then gives PT MEG the freedom to independently and fully manage the Rempang area without the need to consider or view the historical aspects of the area.

From the explanation above, it can be seen that the Batam City Government is unable to fully implement economic development in the city. This is due to the delegation of authority to the Batam Development Authority (BP Batam), the central government agency responsible for developing the Batam City area, including the National Strategic Project (PSN REC). The impact of this delegation of authority between the Batam City Government as an autonomous region and BP Batam as a central government agency in Batam City has triggered implementation problems in the region.

This weak authority of the Batam City Government is also one of the reasons for the instability of the Batam City area's development, particularly the PSN REC, which ultimately creates a dilemma for the Batam City Government as the regional government and the Mayor of Batam as the ex-officio head of BP Batam.

CONCLUSION

The results of the analysis referring to the authority of the concept of decentralization and conflict, based on literature data, regulations, scientific journals obtained and also through information from interviews with Deputy III of BP Batam and representatives of the volunteer group defending the Rempang Movement (APM), found that the source of conflict in the implementation of the PSN REC was caused by several factors, including: First, historical factors of culture and customs as well as customary land. Second, the factor of coercion and repressive actions of law enforcement officers as well as criminalization, thuggery and intimidation from BP Batam and the company. These factors also contributed to the increase in the PSN REC conflict. Third, the factor of BP Batam's inhumane and disharmonious approach to the Rempang community. The source of this conflict is considered to be the responsibility of several parties, including BP Batam, the Regional Government: Batam City Government, the Riau Islands Provincial Government, the Batam City DPRD and the Riau Islands Provincial DPRD, the Central Government: the President, the Ministry of Investment and the Ministry of Economy, and the company: PT MEG.

The strengths of this study can serve as a new reference source for future researchers. Research mapping the conflict and its sources, including the parties responsible for the conflict, and linking it to the concepts of decentralization, agrarian conflict, and cultural practices, remains scarce. Therefore, it serves as a new source of literature for the public, especially academics. The weakness of this study lies in the insufficiently in-depth analysis of the conflict phenomenon on Rempang Island. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers adopt a more appropriate approach to sharpen their analysis and new findings.

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