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House digs in heels over construction project

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House of Representatives ways and means committee deputy chairman Achmad Dimyati Natakusumah said on Tuesday that a plan to expand the House complex was still on track despite the government's decision to extend a moratorium on the construction of official buildings.

Dimyati said that the government had not sent an official request to the House to halt the project.

"Going only by an oral statement [...] we cannot conclude that the moratorium is already official," the United Development Party (PPP) politician told the *The Jakarta Post*.

With only the Gerindra Party expressing opposition, the House of Representatives approved a budget allocation for the construction of a new Rp 740 billion (US$56 million) legislative building in October.

In the 2016 state budget, the government allocated Rp 570 billion to the construction.

But President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo said last week that the moratorium he issued in late 2014 would be extended in an effort to make sure that state funds were spent only on "very important matters".

"Construction will only be allowed for education, for example building schools, and for emergencies, such as for narcotics rehabilitation centers or counterterrorism purposes," Cabinet Secretary Pramono Anung said last week as quoted by *tempo.co*.

On Monday, House Speaker Ade Komarudin said that construction would be halted only with the agreement of the entire House.

"I still need to consult with all political party factions and internal bodies at the House," the Golkar Party politician said.

Lawmaker Hendrawan Supratiknno from the ruling Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) said on Wednesday that he opposed the moratorium if it meant calling off the plan to add to the House complex.

"The moratorium only applies to non-urgent projects. The plan to revamp the House complex, meanwhile, needs to be carried out as soon as possible, give the current inadequacy [of the complex]," he said.

Lawmaker Muhammad Syafi'i from Gerindra said that the House building itself needed an overhaul, as it was no longer able to cope with the growing numbers of people working there.

"The building was supposed to be an office for 500 legislators, with one staff member each. Now the building is used by 560 lawmakers, each with a staff of seven. Just calculate the number of people who pile into this building every day," he said.

He added, however, that the Gerindra faction at the House would not pledge its support to the plan, nor any other program that met public opposition.

- Lawmakers unwilling to abandon plan to revamp House complex
- President last week announced moratorium on new official buildings
- House building 'overcrowded', lawmakers insist

Gerindra was the only party to oppose the plan when it was floated by the ways and means committee last year. Although the plan caused a public outcry, the government decided to allocate Rp 740 billion, though refused to meet the House's demand for Rp 1.6 trillion for the project.

The idea of a megaproject to revamp the legislative complex was first broached in 2008. The concept included the construction of a "civil square", a museum, a library and renovation of offices for legislators and their staff.

In 2011, under the speakership of Democratic Party politician Marzuki Alie, the House once again proposed the project at a cost of Rp 1.16 trillion. The plan was canceled following widespread public criticism and suggestions that drastic improvement of lawmakers' performance was more important than construction of new legislative buildings. **(mos)**