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Tanggal : Sabtu, 19 Agustus 2017
Surat Kabar : Jakarta Post
Halaman : 3

LEGISLATION

House building's renovation plans face fresh rejection

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THE JAKARTA POST/JAKARTA

The House of Representatives might be forced to put its building renovation plans on the back burner due to growing rejection from three House factions from both pro-government and opposition camps.

Calls for postponement from the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), NasDem Party and the United Development Party (PPP) came immediately after the government decided to allocate only Rp 5.7 trillion (US$426.5 million) from its 2018 state budget proposal to supporting the House's legislation works, which have long been criticized as sluggish.

The government's proposal falls short of the Rp 7.2 trillion demanded by the House for its plan to renovate a building and working quarters for both lawmakers and their staff.

The proposed budget, which is 70 percent larger than the Rp 4.3 trillion budget allocated last year, will also cover the construction project of an apartment building for lawmakers and a space designated for demonstrators to voice their concerns.

According to PKS chairman Sohibul Iman, the renovation was necessary to anticipate a growing number of human resources, but the fact that the cash-strapped government has no room for the budget increase should prompt the House to reconsider its plans.

The House will welcome a total of 575 lawmakers after the 2019 elections, an increase from 560 lawmakers serving today, each of whom has two expert staff members and three assistants.

"So, it's better for the House to just postpone construction," Sohibul said on Wednesday.

The lawmakers have until October to lobby the government before the state budget is passed.

NasDem chief patron Surya Paloh was of the same opinion, warning about the potentially deteriorating image of the House, which has recently been criticized for its attempt to undermine the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK).

"NasDem wants the House to postpone [the renovation], although it is urgently needed," Surya said.

A similar call was voiced earlier by Vice President Jusuf Kalla, who cited a state moratorium on the construction of new office buildings for government institutions.

PPP chairman Muhammad Romahurmuziy went further by saying that those insisting on realizing the plan demonstrated ignorance of the country's economy.

"While the people's purchasing power is declining, the legislators are asking for [money] for their own infrastructure development, which is not a priority. That's very unsympathetic behavior," Romahurmuziy said. "The House should instead improve its performance and not ask for more money."

House's Domestic Affairs Committee (BURT) claimed that it had discussed the plan with the Public Works and Public Housing Ministry, during which the latter signaled a go-ahead.

However, Public Works Minister Basuki Hadimuljono said he only told BURT head Anton Sihombing, a Golkar Party lawmaker who had contacted him about the construction plan, that he "was waiting for a formal request from the House."

The ministry has assigned its research center to examine the House building's condition.