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House aims to pass capital city bill in 2022

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The House of Representatives is aiming to pass a bill providing for the relocation of the nation's capital to East Kalimantan by early next year, a lawmaker has said, a possible step forward in one of President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's most ambitious governmental projects.

Lawmaker Ahmad Doli Kurnia, who chairs a special House committee on new capital city, said the deliberation of the bill would resume on Jan. 11, 2022, after a recess, *kompas.com* reported. He expected the deliberation stage to be complete by February.

Doli said he was confident that the discussions between the government and lawmakers would proceed smoothly, as both parties had agreed that the legislation should be passed as soon as possible. He noted that the House would gather public input on the bill during its deliberation.

"From a technical standpoint, there is not much to be discussed about the bill. But because this pertains to an important issue, we also need to hear the public's aspirations," said Doli, a member of the Golkar Party, as quoted by *kompas.com*.

The draft bill, which was submitted by National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas) head Suharso Monoarfa in late September, outlines Jokowi's Rp 466 trillion (US$32.5 billion) project to relocate the nation's capital to East Kalimantan, a move the President has said seeks to bring more equitable economic development across Indonesia.

The draft bill also outlines the establishment of an authority to govern the new capital, whose leader the president will have the sole power to appoint. The provision has raised concerns about the democratic representation of residents of the new capital.

Initially, the capital city authority will have full control over its governance, excluding policy-making powers, security and defense, monetary and fiscal policy, international affairs, religion and the judiciary – all of which are exclusive to the central government.

However, Suharso said the government had agreed to change some provisions following suggestions from lawmakers, who argued that establishing a new authority for the capital city that did not take the form of a regional administration would be unconstitutional.

"[There will be] changes in wording, from 'the government of the new capital' to 'the new capital's regional administration'," said Suharso, as quoted by *kompas.com* on Wednesday.

He added that the capital city authority's power would be limited to the preparation, development and execution of the relocation project.

Jokowi announced the resumption of the project in August, following its delay last year as the government focused on tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. The renewed efforts have raised concerns that additional strain will be put on the state budget while the economic and social fallout of the pandemic lingers.

According to the current plan, the government will finance 19.2 percent of the project, or Rp 89.4 trillion, while the remainder is expected to come from foreign investors and the private sector.

The new capital is to be situated on 256,000 hectares of land straddling North Penajam Paser regency and Kutai Kartanegara regency. The government expects to start the relocation from Jakarta by 2024.

Bappenas previously estimated that it would take 15 to 20 years for the government to fully move to the new capital.