



# AGRARIAN CHRONICLES IN INDONESIA:

Expanding Imagination  
over Periods, Sectors and  
Actors

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# **AGRARIAN CHRONICLES IN INDONESIA: Expanding Imagination over Periods, Sectors and Actors**

Revised edition from Indonesian title:

**KRONIK AGRARIA INDONESIA:**

**Memperluas Imajinasi Lintas Zaman, Sektor dan Aktor**

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Design:

Alit Ambara|Nobodycorp.Internationale Unlimited

2018 (revised edition)

ISBN: 602789444-X

Sekolah Tinggi Pertanahan Nasional (National Land College)  
Collaboration with Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria (Consortium for Agrarian Reform)

# Padang Island: Even Only an Inch of the Land; We Fight For It

Padang Island is located in Meranti Islands Regency, a newly formed district of Bengkalis Regency. Geographically, Padang Island is a peat island with a thickness of more than 3 meters to protect (Keppres No. 32 of 1990). The area of Padang Island is  $\pm$  110,939 ha. In 2009, almost half of Pulau Padang was consecrated to the RAPP through Kepmenhut No. SK 327/Menhut-II/2009 to Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper (RAPP) covering an area of 41,205 ha.

After the concession decision above, the people of Padang Island flared up. Farmers rejected and fought against the matter. Since the Minister of Forestry's 327 Decree was issued in 2009, from December 2009 to January 2012, there were more than 60 protests or rally highly rejecting the presence of RAPP on Padang Island with a resistance, centred in Padang, Selatpanjang, Pekanbaru and Jakarta. Communities and farmers fought the case because Padang Island constitutes a peat island which is very vulnerable to monoculture plants.

In December 2010, RAPP entered the Tanjung Padang Village to construct a dock even though the boundary issue has not

been settled. The community refused such action because the boundary system was unclear and the community's livelihoods having been processed for decades, were threatened. At the beginning of 2011, when the protest was not noticed, the RAPP continued their next process of preparing heavy equipment to build canals. Such action sparked a tension with the community and became an ammunition for the residents of Padang Island to launch their resistance. Since the RAPP began their planning to secretly put heavy equipment to build canals, protests and resistance as well as sabotage from citizens had increasingly appeared. All access to the pier, as a heavy equipment entrance, was supervised by the public. Said that, with police escort, RAPP managed to put in heavy equipment to build canals on Padang Island.

The entry of the RAPP by carrying heavy equipment to the island of Padang without heeding the protests of the residents caused the situation to heat up. In fact, RAPP is not only against the community but at the same time underestimates the resistance of citizens. The situation provoked widespread public protest. M Ridwan, one of the resistance leaders said, "We continue



to coordinate between villages, even almost all village heads whose community land was affected by RAPP, became part of our movement, as the RAPP did not budge with our protests.”

In mid-April 2011, eight RAPP excavator units that made it into the island of Padang destroyed mangrove forests and natural/peat forests to begin the construction of the canal. This activity increased the tension of Pulau Padang residents who had been taking action for months, but as a result, RAPP continued to operate. This action came into a new phase of open resistance, because the RAPP has been unmoved by citizen protests and has never explained the land boundaries as demanded by citizens.

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With the commencement of the RAPP operation, there was also a new round of open conflict between the people of Padang Island versus the RAPP and employees of the company. In May 2011, something feared by many parties occurred; sabotage and burning, which could not be avoided and, even caused casualties for the company.

In the aftermath of the firing, the police conducted sweeping and arrested several community of leaders - farmers. Seventeen people were arrested and tried in Bengkalis and 24 residents became wanted. However, such arrests did not dampen their resistance, precisely to the Padang Island peasant movement

*Yahya alias Kutik and his wife Purwati, when protesting by sewing action of the mouth in front of the MPR/DPR RI Building, Jakarta, December 20, 2011 (Photo source: Lovina)*

who showed themselves being more vigorous. Their method of resistance has changed. In addition to the demonstrations that were still being carried out, as well as lobbies in Pekanbaru and Jakarta, including reckless action by conducting “lip-sewing actions” by M. Ridwan, Sulatra, Sapridin, Khusaini, and Soim, et al.

On December 27, 2011, the Minister of Forestry opened a space by forming a Mediation Team to solve the Padang Island issue. One result, the Minister of Forestry revised the total concession area given to RAPP, from ± 41,205 ha to ± 34,000 ha. But the residents still refused because the amount of land that belongs to the community was still included in the concession area.

The Padang Island community insists that RAPP must leave Padang Island because they have seen the company as a real threat. The peak of the resistance occurred in July 2012, when a desperate action plan would be carried out in Jakarta, namely the act of self-immolation in front of the palace. Six residents of Padang Island left for Jakarta and were ready to carry out

self-immolation. The action was then foiled, and they returned safely to Padang Island.

Since February 2013, RAPP officially “won” and continued to build wood “plantations” (acacia) on the island of Padang. Since then, the community has not resisted because several activists were arrested by security forces in early February 2013, including M. Ridwan and Muis who had been accompanying the community to take action. Such arrest of Ridwan et al. had caused “community resistance to cease” because the RAPP threatened them to fight if residents would not stop their actions from blocking the RAPP operation in Padang Island. (*M. Nazir Salim*)