

INDONESIA: ALCOHOL BAN THREATENS TOURISM



Indonesian tourism professionals oppose a draft bill submitted to the national parliament earlier this year that includes a ban on alcohol. They warn the measure would seriously harm tourism in this world's largest Muslim-majority country.

The proposed legislation concerns tourism professionals, especially in Jakarta and Bali, as well as moderate Muslims who form the majority in the country. In response to opposition that the proposal has been facing, members of the Islamic United Development Party (P.P.P.) who originally submitted the bill, have indicated that they would reduce their demands and instead seek comprehensive regulations on the sale of alcohol. However, to date they still did not issue any alternative proposal.

Conservative Muslim groups proclaimed that they would lobby hard for the tougher legislation during an expected debate in parliament in the coming weeks.

Last July, the Indonesian Supreme Court cancelled a presidential decree dated from 1997, which prohibited local governments to ban the production, sale or consumption of alcohol.

"Alcohol brings more inconveniences than advantages," said Novel Haidar, Secretary of the Jakarta Office from the party of Islamic Defenders Front. He added: "Close to 351 Indonesian districts, sub-districts, cities and villages have already passed laws against alcohol over the last 15 years, and now the decision of the Supreme Court to remove the ban on these regulations made them legal. So from now on, we will apply those rules within these 351 regions by conducting campaigns, and also try to lobby local government of each province and each district in Indonesia to ban alcohol".

However, according to Nyoman Suwidjana, secretary general of the Bali Tourism Board, **a total ban of alcohol would have a "significant impact" on Bali's economy**, an island where the dominant religion is Hinduism, and which mostly depends on the tourism industry.

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