

Action in Solidarity with Asia and the Pacific

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Contents

- [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)
- [NEWS & ISSUES](#)
- [ACEH](#)
- [WEST PAPUA](#)
- [MILITARY TIES](#)
- [HUMAN RIGHTS/LAW](#)
- [CORRUPTION/COLLUSION/NEPOTISM](#)
- [REGIONAL/COMMUNAL CONFLICTS](#)
- [ENVIRONMENT](#)
- [ISLAM/RELIGION](#)
- [ARMED FORCES/DEFENSE](#)
- [BUSINESS & INVESTMENT](#)
- [OPINION & ANALYSIS](#)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

NEWS & ISSUES

- * Police bid to sweep smut off the streets
- * Rich and poor end up paying for their supply
- * Don't target Chinese, SBY tells officials
- * Militant mastermind hiding in Indonesia - police
- * Students protest possible power hike
- * Government pushes ahead with broadcasting rules
- * Military chief apologizes over 'improper act'

ACEH

- * Opposition to amended draft Aceh law growing
- * Government warned of destroying trust in Aceh
- * Kalla opposes independents
- * Aceh law may spur fresh demands but no serious threat
- * Aceh draft law set for parliament test

- * Acehnese may have chance to field independents
- * Basic health and sanitation needs not met in Aceh
- * Student demo in Aceh almost ends in clash with police
- * Komnas HAM asked to follow up grave findings in Aceh
- * Indonesia dismisses tsunami rights abuse report
- * Students protest omissions in Aceh draft law
- * Student oppose removal of articles in draft law
- * Activists decry illegal fees for Aceh-bound timber

WEST PAPUA

- * Foreign media ban in Papua to be maintained: Juwono
- * Defense minister admits some rights abuses in Papua
- * West Papuans 'must escape killing'
- * Ball in Australia's court in asylum case
- * Indonesia pressures government on boat people
- * Indonesia ups ante on Papuans
- * Indonesian Ambassador dismisses claims by Papuans
- * Papua students demand justice over Wagete shooting
- * Indonesian refugees were tortured
- * Dozens reported dead in Papua dysentery outbreak
- * Most locals reject Papua split: MRP
- * Concern for West Papuans' safety
- * West Papua: Genocide continues
- * Who are the asylum seekers?
- * Protests: Let the West Papuan refugees stay!

MILITARY TIES

- * Training 'won't endanger' Papuans
- * End military ties with Indonesia

HUMAN RIGHTS/LAW

- * Women activists yell no to antiporn bill
- * Truth is, SBY 'too busy' for meeting
- * KontraS: TNI does not support Muchdi
- * House told to pursue Munir murder case
- * New probe into Munir murder sought

CORRUPTION/COLLUSION/NEPOTISM

- * Antigraft, antimonopoly bodies join forces
- * 200 BUMN officials probed over graft
- * Few securities firms report suspicious transactions

REGIONAL/COMMUNAL CONFLICTS

- * Ambon refugees still waiting 7 years on
- * Police, soldiers 'fanned' Poso sectarian war

ENVIRONMENT

- * Logging provokes nature's wrath: Activists
- * Outrage over plans for palm oil plantation in rain forest
- * Scientists find 'lost world' in Indonesia
- * Indonesian says waste from mine tainted fish

ISLAM/RELIGION

- * Protests spread in major cities over caricature
- * Muslims rally in four cities over cartoons
- * Government told to take action over Ahmadiyah attack
- * Art on trial as obscenity furor heats up
- * Muslims storm Danish embassy building
- * Muhammadiyah leaning toward more conservative bent
- * NU, Muhammadiyah against unlawful use of sharia
- * Government told to act on religious violations

ARMED FORCES/DEFENSE

- * Ryacudu: There is a global plot to weaken the TNI
- * TNI is being ruined: Ryacudu
- * Military must have a presence in the regions
- * Suyanto vows to reform TNI
- * Draft regulation bans company payment for troops
- * Airforce chief to head military

BUSINESS & INVESTMENT

- * Debt irks lawmakers
- * Trade figures reveal problems faced by local exporters
- * Inflationary pressures still strong: BI
- * High inflation set to persist this year
- * Local auto sector braces for lower duties

OPINION & ANALYSIS

- * In pursuit of a humane Acehnese society
- * Labor and Coalition must act for West Papua

NEWS & ISSUES

Police bid to sweep smut off the streets

Jakarta Post - February 7, 2006

Jakarta — Police officers involved in the crackdown on obscene materials in the capital are not second guessing themselves on whether covers of local adult magazines and tabloids qualify as smut or art. It only takes the showing of skin for a publication to fall foul of the law.

A total of 105 books, 37,000 tabloids and 350 magazines were confiscated recently from newsstands in the five municipalities of Jakarta as well as Depok municipality.

Among such provocatively titled soft-core porn magazines as Lipstik, Girls Wild, Expose and Exotica were mainstream publications of Indonesian versions of Rolling Stone, Male Emporium and For Him Magazine, as well as local men's magazines Matra and Popular.

They were put on display for officials and the media at Jakarta Police Headquarters on Monday, along with 1,874 pirated DVDs and 500 VCDs with pornographic content.

"We've conducted the raids over the past three days, starting Friday, after the National Police chief instructed all city police forces in Indonesia to eradicate pornography," Jakarta Police chief Insp. Gen. Firman Gani said.

They have also arrested 15 alleged manufacturers of the pirated VCDs and DVDs, and questioned 105 people suspected of engaging in the distribution and trade of the adult materials.

The crackdown comes amid the ongoing controversy over the bill on pornography, which is currently before the House of Representatives.

The police said they consulted criminologists, the Press Council and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) on the legal basis for the raids. "The House has not yet passed the pornography law, but if Jakartans are disturbed by the existing pornographic media, then we have the authority to take action," Firman said.

In the joint press conference, State Minister for Information and Communication Sofyan A. Djalil said the government was concerned by the growing presence of pornography. "However, the government still hesitates to arrest the perpetrators because

there is no regulation stipulating (punishment) on the issue," he said.

The Criminal Code authorizes the police to arrest a person who shows, disseminates and displays pornographic pictures or writing in public, an offense which may lead to a maximum jail sentence of two years and eight months. "But the article just punishes a person but not the porn producers," Sofyan said.

In lieu of the new law, the government will use the 1999 Press Law, which bars media from showing pornography, to stop its production, he added. He added a regulation should restrict the distribution of adult materials. "In the United States, porn magazines or that kind of material is legal. But the distribution is restricted to adults only."

The police will also act against phone sex services, models and photographers involved in producing pornographic materials or pornographic broadcasts. "But we will discuss the issue with experts first before taking any action," Firman said.

Rich and poor end up paying for their supply

Jakarta Post - February 6, 2006

Abdul Khalik, Jakarta — Water is the great equalizer for Jakartans, whether they live in a swank neighborhood of the city or a crowded kampong only a stone's throw away. For everybody has to pay extra to get a drop that is fit to drink.

Mother-of-two Inneke is not too bothered when it comes to meeting her family's daily water needs. Like most middle to upper-income consumers, she has a system in place for her clean water supply and the money to pay for it.

"We always buy bottled water to drink, while for bathing, washing and cooking we use tap water. It would be great if we could use water from the faucet for drinking, but right now we drink bottled water for reasons of practicality," said the resident of an upmarket neighborhood in

Kebayoran Baru, South Jakarta.

Water is a much more difficult commodity to come by for most Jakarta families, especially low-income residents, for whom a 19-liter gallon of mineral water at Rp 10,000 (about US\$1) or a Rp 3,500 1.5 liter bottle are too expensive.

They must boil piped water or groundwater to rid it of impurities and make it safe to drink. It's become an even more expensive commodity since last year's rise in price of the liquid natural gas and kerosene used to boil the water.

There are two water supply operators — PT Thames Pam Jaya (TPJ) and PT Pam Lyonaisse Jaya (Palyja) — who were appointed by the city administration to take care of water supply and distribution. Both serve 700,000 households. Palyja serves customers in western Jakarta, while TPJ supplies water to the city's east.

TPJ water production manager Sri W. Kaderi acknowledged that water supplied to customers' houses was still far from potable quality although the company strived to make it as clean as possible.

"Many things happen on the way to customers' houses. We can directly drink water here at the production center but because of aging rusty pipes and, in many cases, holes in several pipes, water at the customers' houses must be boiled," he said.

Palyja's senior commissioner Bernard Lafrogne said most pipes used to distribute water to customers were installed during the Dutch administration — meaning they are about 200 years old — and it would take time for the companies to upgrade them.

Of the total of 4,300 kilometers of the old tap water networks, Palyja has managed to replace 690 kilometers, while TPJ has repaired 159 kilometers since its operations in the capital began in 1998. Their contracts require them to repair or change the pipes until 2020.

Despite the aging pipes, both Sri and Lafrogne said there were regular checks of the system, jointly carried out by the companies, PAM Jaya and the Jakarta Health Agency.

Don't target Chinese, SBY tells officials

Jakarta Post - February 5, 2006

Tony Hotland, Jakarta — President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono reassured the public Saturday that Chinese-Indonesians were legally recognized and their constitutional rights guaranteed by the state, therefore, any acts of discrimination against them must be stopped.

Speaking before some 5,000 Confucians in a gathering to celebrate Chinese New Year in Jakarta, he called on them to work together to integrate and to close the existing gap with other members of society.

In the same event, Indonesian Confucian High Council chairman Budi S. Tanuwibowo said Confucians were still deprived of their basic rights, such as to have their marriages recognized, to have access to lessons in Confucianism at school for their children and to have their religion printed on their identity cards.

"We hope President Susilo's administration will make this real since the government's commitment to say "No" to discrimination still has to be demonstrated," he said.

Yudhoyono acknowledged the complaints over discriminatory acts against Chinese-Indonesians with regards citizenship, nationality, religious rituals and marriages.

Despite the state recognition of Chinese-Indonesians, officials at the lower bureaucratic levels and common people were still adjusting to the changes, he said.

"This is a sociological phase that requires time and hard work on the part of the government and collective goodwill," the President said. He promised that the government, based on Law No. 22/2003, would facilitate access to Confucianist lessons at schools in the near future.

Yudhoyono asserted that marriages conducted in the Confucianist tradition were legally recognized, therefore, there was no reason for government

officials not to record them in the Civil Registry Office.

"The law acknowledges Confucianism as one of the religions in Indonesia, and in principle the state guarantees the freedom of their followers to practice their religious duties. There's no need to fear and no reason to say you're being discriminated against," he said.

The President also told the Chinese-Indonesians to continue sharing with less fortunate members of the public, including victims of natural disasters. "This surely will help the integration process, which in turn will create the glory of this nation," Yudhoyono said.

This year's celebration of Chinese New Year known as Imlek, which fell on Jan. 29, was the seventh after former president Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid rescinded Presidential Instruction No. 14/1967 in 2000 that banned such an event from being openly celebrated. Abdurrahman's successor Megawati Soekarnoputri followed suit by declaring the Chinese New Year a national holiday.

State officials attending Saturday's ceremony at the Jakarta Convention Center included Religious Affairs Minister Maftuh Basyuni, Home Affairs Minister M. Ma'ruf, Tourism Minister Jero Wacik, Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Aburizal Bakrie, House of Representatives Speaker Agung Laksono, Constitutional Court chief Jimly Asshiddiqie and Jakarta Governor Sutiyoso.

Also in attendance were Gus Dur, who is also a former Nahdlatul Ulama leader, Muhammadiyah chairman Din Syamsuddin, Indonesian Hindu Dharma Council chairman I.N. Suwandha, Indonesian Communion of Churches chairman A.A. Yewangoe and Indonesian Bishops Conference chairman Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja.

Militant mastermind hiding in Indonesia - police

Reuters - February 3, 2006

Jakarta — One of Southeast Asia's most wanted militants is hiding in Indonesia's Central Java province, police said on Friday as they declared

more suspects in attacks on the holiday island of Bali last October.

Deputy national police spokesman Brigadier-General Anton Bahrul Alam said police had arrested 12 suspects for their involvement in last year's October 1 suicide bombings on restaurants in Bali, which killed 20 people.

Alam said four people who had been arrested in Bali were directly linked to the bombings, while the others, detained in Central Java province, were named as suspects for helping hide accused militant mastermind Noordin M. Top. Asked whether Malaysian-born Top was still in Central Java province, Alam said: "Of course. Where else would he run?"

Top is blamed for helping mastermind a series of bombings in Indonesia in recent years, including the 2005 Bali attacks carried out by three suicide bombers with backpacks, and attacks in Bali three years earlier that left 202 people dead.

Police said last week that Top, already identified as a senior player in Southeast Asian militant network Jemaah Islamiah, had more recently proclaimed himself leader of a group called Tanzim Qaedat al-Jihad, or Organisation for the Basis of Jihad. Jemaah Islamiah is considered a regional arm of al Qaeda, and police said the new group might have an al Qaeda link as well.

Top worked closely in Indonesia with fellow Malaysian Azahari bin Husin, who was killed in a police raid on his East Java hideout in November.

On Friday, Alam said documents seized late last year after the October Bali bombings laid out plans for terror attacks on densely populated Java island, but he gave no further details.

Police say Top is an expert in recruiting young suicide bombers among Indonesia's impoverished masses.

Students protest possible power hike

Jakarta Post - February 2, 2006

Bandung — Emotions ran high during a protest

Wednesday outside the provincial council building and governor's office here against a proposal by state power firm PT PLN to raise electricity rates.

The protesters, from Bandung Institute of Technology and the Association of Islamic Students (HMI), burned several tires outside the gates of the building. When police used fire extinguishers to put out the blaze, the wind blew the spray from the extinguishers toward the protesters. Soon, several students were involved in a physical clash with officers, though no one was seriously injured.

A member of HMI, Vito, criticized the proposal to raise power rates, accusing the government of ignoring the poor. He also called for an investigation into the finances of PLN. "(The planned hike) spells death for the poor, who are already suffering due to the fuel price increases," he said.

Government pushes ahead with broadcasting rules

Jakarta Post - February 1, 2006

Muninggar Sri Saraswati, Jakarta — Defying opposition from lawmakers and media groups, the government says it will enforce a new regulation that bans local broadcasters from directly relaying news from foreign TV and radio stations.

"The government regulation will be enforced on Feb. 5 to avoid lawlessness in the broadcasting industry," State Minister of Communications and Information Sofyan Djalil said Monday during a meeting with the House of Representatives.

Sofyan said there were more than 1,000 companies waiting for broadcasting licenses, which could not be approved until the regulation was implemented.

Legislators and broadcasting organizations have demanded that the information ministry delay implementing the regulation, pending talks with the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI) to discuss possible revisions.

Sofyan said the government was willing to talk to the KPI to revise several articles in the

regulation that were deemed controversial.

The regulation will take effect two months after the government first agreed to postpone its implementation, following a meeting with legislators last month.

KPI deputy chairman S. Sinansari Ecip has threatened to file a judicial review with the Supreme Court to stop the regulation becoming policy.

The government ruling is based on the 2002 Broadcasting Law. That law is expected to be revised after protests from the KPI and other critics, who said it was unclear and could have multiple interpretations.

Contentious issues in the regulation include stopping local electronic media from directly relaying news provided by foreign agencies, and an article reviving the information ministry's power to issue broadcasting licenses.

Many radio and TV stations in the country broadcast news and current affairs programs from a range of international sources, including the BBC, Voice of America, Radio Australia, Deutsche Welle of Germany and Radio Hilversum of the Netherlands.

Shortwave programming by BBC and VOA stations will not be affected by the ban, nor will it affect foreign content on satellite news and cable channels or the Internet.

Several legislators and broadcasting associations have criticized the regulation as "repressive", saying it could be misused to curb press freedom in Indonesia. They say the independent KPI, not the information ministry, should be granted the authority to issue broadcasting licenses.

Dedi Djamaluddin, a legislator from the National Mandate Party, likened the current information ministry to "the past Deppen", the repressive New Order ministry, which often revoked broadcasters and publishers' licenses when they criticized the government.

"Why doesn't (the minister) talk with the KPI first and finish (the revisions) a month before implementing the controversial regulation? This

would be reasonable," he said.

Sofyan, however, said he planned to issue another ministerial decree to allow radio and TV stations to edit foreign programs before they were broadcast.

Officials at Sofyan's office said the KPI should not be given the power to license broadcasters because they didn't want the independent commission "to become the next"Deppen".

Military chief apologizes over 'improper act'

Jakarta Post - February 1, 2006

Jongker Rumteh, Manado — Wirabuana Military Commander Maj. Gen. Arief Budi Sampurno apologized Monday to the press for the actions of one of his soldiers who struck a reporter covering a weekend clash between members of the local combat detachment and Manado Police.

"I apologize to the press over the improper behavior during the news coverage," Sampurno said when receiving a group of people, including reporters, who staged a protest over the incident in front of the Army barracks in Manado.

One soldier was killed and six police officers seriously injured when a police truck rammed into a crowd of people during a dispute between military troops and police officers in Manado in the early hours of Sunday.

During the incident another soldier seized a camera and struck Wennsy Pantouw, a cameraman at Indosiar TV station, who later sought medical treatment for his injuries.

Sampurno, who oversees security in Sulawesi, said he supported the protesters' demand to halt violence against the press. "The role of the media is very important because through the media all information can be disseminated. I fully support freedom of the press," Sampurno said as quoted by Antara.

He promised to take stern action against the soldier. "We have to abide by the law... whether the decision will lead to his discharge or not...

everything will be processed in accordance with current regulations and will be done as transparently as possible," he said.

He also said he would cover all medical expenses and other losses incurred during the incident.

Sampurno said an investigation into the clash between the soldiers and police officers would be conducted jointly by the Indonesian Military and the National Police.

"That's why I have come to Manado, to cooperate with the North Sulawesi Police regarding the investigation of the incident," he said, declining to provide a chronology of the incident.

Sampurno's spokesman, Maj. Rustam Effendi, earlier said the dispute started after a group of policemen riding motorcycles accidentally hit Army soldier Second Sgt. Husni Daud.

This sparked a response from Husni's comrades. Another soldier, Julius, demanded an explanation from the police but was not satisfied with the response, according to Rustam. A policeman then fired a shot into the air, drawing the attention of local residents, Rustam said.

Minutes later, a police truck appeared and smashed into a crowd of people at the scene, killing Second Sgt. Ferly Ahmad and seriously injuring six policemen.

Sampurno said his military command had questioned seven witnesses — three soldiers and four civilians.

ACEH

Opposition to amended draft Aceh law growing

Aceh Kita - February 7, 2006

M Isma & Saiful Bahri, Banda Aceh — Demonstrations "opposing" the Home Affairs Department's revisions to the Draft Law on a Government for Aceh (RUU-PA) are continuing and spreading. This time it was the turn of Student Solidarity for the People (SMUR) and the Bireuen Civil Society Alliance (AGSB) to protest the draft

law that they say fails to accommodate the aspirations of the Acehnese people.

The action on Monday February 6 was the third recorded in Aceh since the Department of Home Affairs submitted the draft law to the House of Representatives (DPR). Protests have sprung up because demonstrators believe the government has ignored the aspirations contained in the Acehnese people's version of the RUU-PA.

During the action, SMUR secretary general Rahmat Djailani urged that the RUU-PA become the basis for the welfare and justice for the Acehnese people. According to Djailani, the omission of 37 articles by the government indicates a blocking of the development of a people's democracy and the nationalisation of mineral, energy and other natural resources.

Djailani accused the national political elite of being unwilling for Aceh's natural resources to be enjoyed and managed by the Acehnese people. "What is in their minds is how Aceh's natural resources can continue to be taken away leaving the Acehnese people to remain in poverty", he said.

In relation to this issue, SMUR is calling for the RUU-PA to be able to guarantee the welfare of the Acehnese people. This can be fulfilled if the government includes all of the articles that had already been discussed by Acehnese society beforehand.

SMUR's position he told journalists after giving a speech is to reject the version of the RUU-PA that does not include the articles on independent candidates and the nationalisation of mineral, energy and other natural resources in Aceh. "These two points or these articles are a prerequisite for the welfare of the people", he said.

SMUR he said is calling on the Acehnese people not to no longer trust the old political elite, the remnants of the New Order regime that have transformed themselves into various new forms. It is for this reason that they are calling on the Acehnese people to prepare themselves to confront future efforts to impoverish them.

Bireuen

In Bireuen meanwhile, it was reported that hundreds of demonstrators from AGSB also protested the central government's actions in trimming away the aspirations of the Acehese people.

In a statement the Alliance strongly rejected the cutting down of the RUU-PA so that it no longer contains the substantial demands of the Acehese people such as independent candidates and the authority of an Acehese government. They also condemned the arrogant attitude of the political elite in the government and the DPR who do not wish for the Acehese to be safe, affluent and dignified.

The Alliance appealed to the Acehese people not to use their right to vote in the elections of the next Acehese governor later this year if the substance of the people's aspirations are not accommodated in the RUU-PA. Nevertheless, the Alliance called on the people to monitor the discussions of the RUU-PA and to safeguard the peace that has been created in Aceh. In addition to this the Alliance is urging the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) to actively participate in monitoring the discussion phase of the draft law as mandated by Point 5.2e in the Memorandum of Understanding between the Free Aceh Movement and the Indonesian Government.

The demonstration by AGSB started in Peusangan. They then went to the AMM representative offices in Bireuen and then to the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) by bus. On arriving at the parliament they were confronted by a blockade of police officers. In front of the DPRD they held speeches and called on the members of the DPRD to meet with them.

"If we cannot all fit into the air-conditioned chamber, then we ask the members of the DPRD to come down and hear our statement, that will later be faxed to the president of Indonesia, the Minister of Home Affairs, the DPR and the Acehese DPRD", shouted Fuadi through a microphone.

A number of assembly members then met with the demonstrators. "We have already spoken with the leaders [of the demonstration], and we have submitted their statement to the secretariat to be faxed to the parties they requested", explained Murdani Yusuf, the head of the Bireuen DPRD's

Commission A. [dzie]

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Government warned of destroying trust in Aceh

Jakarta Post - February 6, 2006

Muninggar Sri Saraswati, Jakarta — The House of Representatives has yet to start deliberating the bill on Aceh's future governance but opposition and criticism of its contents have already been voiced.

The objections mainly revolve around the government's decision to drop a number of articles proposed by the Aceh legislative council from the bill the government submitted to the House for deliberation late last month.

Apart from the controversial issue of independent candidates, the criticism has also been focused on lack of clarity over the definition of Aceh's territory.

While the Aceh council's version of the bill stipulates that Aceh's territory is as defined on July 1, 1956, and in accordance with the truce signed by the government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) last August in Finland, the Home Affairs Ministry's bill allows for the possible splitting of Aceh into several provinces.

The government-drafted bill also allows for the creation of new regencies in Aceh. "It (the partition) will likely shatter the process of trust-building process between the government and GAM," said Agung Wijaya, a member of the Aceh Democracy Network.

He said the move also showed that the central government wanted to maintain its control over the resource-rich province. "The evidence on this issue is very clear," he said over the weekend.

The partition of Aceh is accommodated in Article 5 of the bill, which states, "the establishment, abolition and the merger of regencies/municipalities, districts and villages shall be carried out in accordance with law".

Agung said that this allowed the central government to carve new provinces out of Aceh's territory without seeking the approval of the Aceh legislative council.

Indra J. Piliang, a researcher with the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), expressed a similar view, saying that allowing the partition of Aceh would destroy trust building the government and the former GAM insurgents. "Don't let this bill give rise to new conflict in Aceh," he said.

Demands for the establishment of two new provinces in Aceh resurfaced last year after the signing of the truce that ended three decades of separatist fighting.

While the proponents of the creation of an Aceh Leuser Antara (ALA) province started their campaign in 2000, those supporting the establishment of a Southwest Aceh (ABS) province only announced their plan last year.

If formed, ALA would comprise Central Aceh, Southeast Aceh, Aceh Singkil, Gayo Lues and Bener Meriah regencies, while Southwest Aceh would consist of South Aceh, Northwest Aceh, Aceh Jaya, Samuelue and Nagan Raya regencies. Currently, Aceh is divided into 20 regencies and municipalities.

Last week, supporters of ALA and ABS visited the House and met with a number of legislators. They appear to be determined to engineer the partition of Aceh, although many at the grassroots level are not interested in the issue.

Agung said people in both areas, who are still struggling to survive after the tsunami that devastated Aceh late in 2004, are more interested in questions like better welfare, more justice and peace-building. "The (partition) issue has been concocted by local political elites seeking power," he said.

Home Affairs Minister M. Ma'ruf refused to comment on the possible partition of Aceh, saying that he would not make any statement pending the bill's deliberation.

Kalla opposes independents

Jakarta Post - February 6, 2006

Banda Aceh — Vice President Jusuf Kalla says he opposes the inclusion of a clause in the bill on governance in Aceh that would allow independent candidates to run for public posts.

Kalla insisted Sunday the issue of independent political candidates was not specifically dealt with in the peace deal the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement signed in Helsinki last year.

"The peace agreement allows the Acehnese extensive political participation, but there is no specific clause that guarantees independent candidates the right to contest direct elections," Kalla said during a meeting with senior Acehnese leaders.

Independent candidates was proposed by the Aceh provincial legislative council. The bill on governance in Aceh has been submitted by the government to the House of Representatives in Jakarta for deliberation.

"People in Aceh do not need to worry the future law (on governance in Aceh) will deviate from the Helsinki agreement," Kalla said as quoted by Antara news agency.

Aceh law may spur fresh demands but no serious threat

Agence France Presse - February 5, 2006

Bhimanto Suwastoyo, Jakarta — Indonesia's parliament is set to scrutinize a draft law granting war-torn Aceh unprecedented autonomy, which may spur demands from other regions for similar deals but poses no serious threat, analysts say.

Indonesia, an archipelago of more than 17,000 islands that are home to people speaking hundreds of languages, has battled separatist grumblings in its far-flung corners since it proclaimed independence from the Dutch in 1945.

The contentious Aceh law, the next stage of a peace process hurried along by the 2004 tsunami

tragedy which killed some 165,000 Acehnese, sees Indonesia make the greatest concessions yet in order to preserve its borders peacefully.

After nearly three decades of bloody separatist conflict, Indonesia signed a peace pact with the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) last August guaranteeing the staunchly-Muslim province at the tip of Sumatra island sweeping autonomy.

GAM agreed to drop its demand for independence in return for, among other concessions, the right to form local political parties — something that is banned elsewhere in the archipelago to discourage separatism.

But not everyone was pleased with the deal, to be codified in the draft law. Parliament is due to form a commission to discuss it on Tuesday.

Opposition has been fierce among some lawmakers, whose feathers were already ruffled by the government's failure to consult them over the August pact. They say Jakarta may have gone too far in its compromises.

In particular they fear that provinces such as resource-rich Papua, at the opposite end of Indonesia thousands of kilometres away, could try to use the pact as a model for themselves.

"It's very possible. (The law) could have effects on other regions," Sidharto Danusubroto, a member of the nationalist opposition Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, told AFP.

He said his party, led by former president Megawati Sukarnoputri, was "meticulously studying the draft law to make sure it will not go against our national laws and constitution."

Amir Santoso, from the University of Indonesia, agreed that the passage of the law, not yet fully revealed to the public, could "see other regions queuing to make similar demands."

Papua was only incorporated into Indonesia in the 1960s. Pro-independence sentiment, fueled by rights abuses and annoyance over funds from resources flowing to Jakarta, mean it remains a potential flashpoint. "Our nation is still politically immature and this is where the problem

may lay," Santoso warned.

Nationalists are still smarting from the 1999 loss of East Timor, which voted for independence in the tumultuous aftermath of the resignation of ex-president Suharto, who ruled with an iron fist for more than three decades.

Syamsuddin Harris, a political researcher at the Indonesian Institute for Sciences, said that while other regions may be encouraged to make demands, none have as strong a case to make as Aceh for special concessions.

Besides a history of resistance stretching back centuries — including nearly 40 years of battling the Dutch — the province was granted special territory status in the early 1960s. It proved to be a paper concession.

And, Harris said, the Aceh pact involved the mediation of foreigners and has the support of the international community.

"And this makes honoring the pact a national obligation," he said, adding that a 2002 autonomy law, which decentralises much of Jakarta's power to local administrations, should be enough to address grievances elsewhere.

Azyumardi Azra, chancellor of the Higher State Institute for Islamic Sciences, said this 2002 law covers most points disputed in the Aceh bill. One exception is the article on local political parties.

Under Indonesian law, parties must be based in Jakarta and have branches in more than half the country's 33 provinces but Aceh will be exempted from this.

"What everyone should remember is that, if there are separatist aspirations, they will clearly not be because of the existence of the local political parties, but rather to injustice and inequalities in policies," Azra said.

The University of Indonesia's Santoso added that with or without Aceh, greater autonomy needs to be granted to the regions under the law in any case.

"For a country as large as ours, I don't think greater autonomy for the regions will break up our

unity. On the contrary," he said, noting that areas where separatist sentiment could flare now enjoyed autonomy — at least in laws on paper. "Just implement them to the letter," he added.

Aceh draft law set for parliament test

Reuters - February 4, 2006

Achmad Sukarsono, Jakarta — A draft law aimed at cementing a peace deal between Indonesia and rebels in Aceh province will be debated for the first time in parliament this week, with legislators facing a tight deadline to pass it.

Under the August 15 pact, Indonesia must approve laws by March 31 that give Aceh control of most of its affairs and former rebels of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) the chance to form a local political party to compete in direct elections.

Creating the law is the next biggest step after GAM disarmed in December and Indonesia pulled tens of thousands of troop and police reinforcements from Aceh.

But analysts say political challenges lie ahead for the draft, which could strain a landmark peace deal that ended three decades of war which killed 15,000 people.

The draft has gone through numerous deliberations in Aceh and Jakarta. The version submitted to parliament and obtained by Reuters, has watered down some of GAM's proposals, including one that would have allowing Aceh to join the United Nations.

If passed — and nationalist opposition to the peace deal was high in parliament — the draft document will hand Aceh more powers than any province in Indonesia.

According to the peace deal, Aceh's first direct elections should take place in April 2006, to elect a governor.

The draft stipulates local political parties can be set up as long as they have branches in half of Aceh's districts and towns. But the draft says setting up these parties needs time, with further

regulations to be drawn up before February 2007.

This is in line with the Finnish-mediated peace deal that says the Indonesian government has 18 months from the signing to create an environment for local parties to function.

Analysts say the government does not want GAM members running for office before that time, which means only existing parties can put forward candidates for the governor's job.

"The government clearly does not want GAM to lead the region. They want to see a local rival to GAM (have time to form) first," said analyst Indra Jaya Piliang from the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta.

No Aceh-based group is as ready as GAM to run for Aceh's top office, which will only be up for grabs again in 2011.

Contentious issue

Allowing local parties is sensitive because it contravenes an existing law requiring all political parties to have branches in more than half of Indonesia's 33 provinces.

Analysts say while the government supports local parties for Aceh — which would include ones that would challenge GAM — it wants to avoid a fight in parliament that could jeopardize efforts to pass the bill by March 31.

GAM in turn has said the draft ignored one of its key proposals — letting independent candidates run in April — which would have allowed former GAM members to run for governor.

"Why should they block this proposal? There are many in Aceh who do not want to funnel their aspirations through the existing political parties," said Teungku Kamaruzzaman, a former GAM negotiator who was freed from prison after the peace deal.

He argued that an article in the truce saying "the people of Aceh will have the right to nominate candidates" for all elected offices meant independent candidates must be allowed.

GAM is not alone as Acehnese students, academics and pressure groups want fresh faces to be able to

run as independents in the devout Muslim province on the northern tip of Sumatra island.

However, some political parties in Indonesia's fractious parliament that will debate the draft are the same ones which have blocked public demands to let independent candidates run in any Indonesian election.

"These parties are afraid of losing their grip in the regions if independent candidates are allowed. In Aceh, GAM or independent candidates mean suicide for existing parties," said analyst Muhammad Qodari of the Indonesian Survey Institute.

GAM and Indonesia's government signed the peace deal after months of negotiations spurred by the December 2004 tsunami that smashed into Indian Ocean coastlines. That disaster left around 170,000 Acehnese dead or missing.

Acehnese may have chance to field independents

Jakarta Post - February 4, 2006

Tony Hotland and Muninggar Sri Saraswati, Jakarta — The government and the House of Representatives may allow independent candidates to contest local elections in Aceh, although the issue is not in the draft bill on Aceh governance.

Vice President Jusuf Kalla, who initiated the peace talks between the government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), said legislators would explore the possibility of allowing independent candidates, when they started to debate the bill this month.

Kalla was responding to GAM's concerns that the bill drafted by the government did not include clauses on independent candidates. The bill does allow former GAM members to create independent political parties to contest elections.

"It's still a draft. The Helsinki peace accord doesn't specifically say anything about independent candidates, although the clause 1.2.2 could lead in that direction," he said.

Clause 1.2.2 of the Memorandum of Understanding

signed by GAM and the government in August last year, states that "upon the signature of this MOU, the people of Aceh will have the right to nominate candidates for the positions of all elected officials to contest the elections in Aceh in April 2006 and thereafter". "We put in the bill only things that are explicitly described in the MOU, and independent candidates are not," Kalla said.

A lawmaker said Kalla had been in favor of including independent candidates in the bill before it was submitted to the House, but Home Affairs Minister M. Ma'ruf disagreed.

Nasir Djamil of the Prosperous Justice Party, said he had been informed that home affairs ministry officials, who drafted the bill, failed to explain it properly to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, prompting him to decide to drop the independent candidacy clause but maintain the local party clause.

Nasir gave his support Friday to the possibility of independent candidates in Aceh elections, which he said would give former GAM rebels more opportunities to be involved in the political process. "We will officially propose the clause during the debate of the Aceh governing bill," he said.

Golkar legislator Ferry Mursyidan Baldan said central government should open the door to independent candidates in local elections because it would increase confidence in the peace deal. "There is nothing to be afraid of. The move will likely support the trust-building between the government and GAM after the signing of the MOU," he said.

Indra J. Piliang of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) agreed. He said the situation on the ground in Aceh along with the likely time constraints meant it would be difficult if not impossible for GAM to set up a local political party to contest this year's regional elections.

However, the years of strife in the region meant it was equally unlikely former GAM members would want to join national-based political parties, most of which had supported the government's war against GAM.

Currently, there are more than 18 vacant political positions in Aceh, including the post of the governor. The MOU stipulates that regional and provincial elections in the province should be held in April. However, the government has said this date may have to be moved back to June or July give the House more time to debate the bill. Lawmakers have a March deadline to pass the legislation.

GAM members have already made some preparations for the regional elections, including selecting likely candidates.

Basic health and sanitation needs not met in Aceh

Associated Press - February 4, 2006

Margie Mason — More than a year after the tsunami swallowed thousands of lives and homes in Indonesia, many survivors still lack of basic health and sanitation needs despite billions of dollars in disaster aid, a new study found.

Children and those living on the remote island of Simeulue — located closest to the epicenter of the Dec. 26, 2004 earthquake — remained most vulnerable, while access to clean drinking water and proper sanitation continued to be poor in some areas, according to the study published Friday by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The survey was conducted last July and August in three districts of Aceh province. It found that 40 percent of the stored drinking water sampled was contaminated and half of the children under 5 years old were anemic, while about 75 percent of school-age children surveyed on Simeulue island and in Aceh Besar district were infected with intestinal parasites.

Dr. Endang Widyastuti, who oversees aid group CARE International's medical programs in Indonesia and participated in the joint study with the CDC, said many of the findings were not surprising, and that awareness and intervention campaigns are in the works.

"For the worm infection, it is no wonder," she said, referring to the many who remain homeless.

"These cases in Banda Aceh and Simeulue, it's no wonder because of the (poor) access to toilets and the environment."

Access to toilets was lacking on Simeulue, with more than 50 percent of households without facilities, the survey found.

Widyastuti said a de-worming campaign is planned and that mothers in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar districts are being encouraged to breast feed to help lessen anemia. A measles vaccination campaign will also be conducted after the findings showed poor coverage from an earlier push.

On Simeulue, where malnutrition was highest, Widyastuti said logistics likely played a role. More than 90 percent of the households surveyed received some type of food aid, and more than half also received nutritional supplements.

But she said distribution that came in the first months following the tsunami trailed off because aid workers' efforts were diverted elsewhere. Simeulue lost only a handful of its 75,000 people to the waves, largely because most residents ran to the hills after the 9.0-magnitude earthquake because of stories passed down about a tsunami that occurred there a century ago.

The bulk of the more than 131,000 people who died in Indonesia were in the provincial capital, Banda Aceh, but Simeulue lost the most homes — more than 80 percent were partially or completely destroyed by the tsunami or by the earthquake that rocked neighboring Nias island last March.

Student demo in Aceh almost ends in clash with police

Aceh Kita - February 3, 2006

Nasir Gabra, Lhokseumawe — A demonstration launched by hundreds of Malikussaleh Lhokseumawe University (Unimal) students almost ended in a clash with police when they pushed and shoved each other as students tried to break through the gates of the North Aceh Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) on Thursday February 2.

Earlier, the students had sat quietly presenting speeches in front of the gate. They were demanding

that the DPRD's special committee looking into corruption at the Unimal Rectorate immediately announce the results of the public.

"Several times the special committee has promised it would announce [its] corruption findings at Unimal, but to this day they have not fulfilled this", asserted Idris, one of the students.

In the end he said, the special committee promised it would hold a hearing on January 31 to announce its findings. Because there was no hearing, on January 1 [should read February 1 - JB] student representatives again went to see the special committee. "Nothing came out of the meeting, so today we brought the students to demonstrate", said Sofyan, a former secretary of the Unimal Student Executive Council.

The students are now even accusing a member of the North Aceh DPRD of also benefiting from corruption at Unimal. It is because of this they say, that the investigation by the special committee has dragged on and the impression is that they are reluctant to explain their findings to the public.

"We are truly deplore this, [they are] the people that should control corruption, collusion and nepotism, but they still have the mentality of rats", shouted a student activist through a megaphone.

Initially he said, the special committee had found indications of financial irregularities at Unimal. This included a greening project on the new Reuleut campus valued at 330 million rupiah, a bridge construction project and a campus ring road costing 571 million rupiah, as well as indications of the embezzlement of scholarship funds for 5,000 students budgeted at 500,000 rupiah per student.

"Not only that, there are still many indications of the corruption of other funds at Unimal that must be explained by the special committee. But the special committee remains silent", he said.

In a statement the students called on the National Education Minister not to issue an instruction for the inauguration of the newly elected Unimal rector until the various corruption cases are dealt with legally.

The coordinator of the DPRD's special team, Ridwan Yunus, explained to the students that they have hold a plenary session before being able to announce the team's findings to the public. In order to do this there are specific procedures that have to be followed and this requires time. He asked the students therefore to be patient.
[dzie]

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Komnas HAM asked to follow up grave findings in Aceh

Detik.com - February 2, 2006

Nur Raihan, Jakarta — The Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras) Aceh has asked the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) to follow up the finding of graves of victims of the conflict in Aceh. Twenty-two graves have been recorded containing 37 skeletons that have been found since the Helsinki agreement was signed in August.

This was related to journalists by the coordinator of Kontras Aceh's working body, Asiah, at the Kontras offices in Aceh on Wednesday February 2. Kontras has asked police to follow up the findings and that they be involved in the process of unearthing the graves.

"Our assumption is that the human rights violations that occurred during the period of martial law in Aceh are related to the finding of these graves of victims of the Aceh conflict", said Asiah.

The question is said Asiah, that in a number of cases, the graves were found at former security posts that had been occupied by non-organic TNI (Indonesian military) troops and in a number of other cases, the victims had been arrested or abducted when the state of martial law was in force.

"The condition of the skeletons that were found generally indicate that there had been acts of violence or torture. Of those who have been identified they are usually reburied properly by their families, but if not then hospital staff

bury them", he added.

Police have been asked to immediately secure grave locations after receiving reports from local people. "Moreover during the period of martial law, Komnas HAM had already obtained reports of a number of cases of abductions and arrests", added Asiah.

This time the skeletons have been found spread across various parts of Aceh such as Greater Aceh, North Aceh, East Aceh, Aceh Tamiang, Bireun and Central Aceh. (wiq)

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Indonesia dismisses tsunami rights abuse report

Reuters - February 2, 2006

Achmad Sukarsono, Jakarta — Indonesia, which suffered the most from the Indian Ocean tsunami, dismissed on Thursday a report that accused several governments of failing to meet human rights standards in relief efforts.

ActionAid International, the Habitat International Coalition and the People's Movement for Human Rights Learning charged on Wednesday that while the tsunami aid campaign had many successes, it failed to ensure the rights of many of those affected to food, clean water and a secure home and livelihood.

Aburizal Bakrie, chief social welfare minister in Indonesia, said the "the report sounds weird" to anyone who had seen the scale of the devastation.

Killer waves triggered by a magnitude 9.15 earthquake off Indonesia's Sumatra island slammed into 13 Asian and African countries on December 26, 2004, flattening thousands of villages and killing around 230,000 people.

In Indonesia's Aceh province alone, the tsunami left some 170,000 people dead or missing. The report acknowledged the severity of the tragedy but insisted failure to comply with human rights standards would deepen the suffering of those who survived the onslaught.

Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, head of Indonesia's reconstruction agency in Aceh, said human rights had always been upheld. "I know we have holes here and there. I know some houses don't have sanitation or electricity. I know that some of the displaced have not received their daily stipends," he said. "But I live in Aceh and I know there is no human rights violation against the displaced."

Women ignored?

Indonesia was particularly unhappy by accusations it had ignored women's rights in relocation efforts. "In an emergency situation there is no immediate plan or script to give women different treatment. If women must stay with male survivors together in tents, that's how it is," said Bakrie.

Womens groups in Aceh have said female survivors who lost male relatives had been subject to sexual harassment in temporary wooden barracks.

"Rights abuses on women are not seen as offences in Aceh," said Mia Emsa, head of the Aceh Gender Transformation Working Group, referring to the traditionally higher status accorded to men and the devout nature of Islam in the province.

"When we try to seek our rights we are seen as troublesome." Her group wanted a clear allocation for female needs in the reconstruction budget, she added. Kuntoro said the building of female-only bathrooms and rest areas for the displaced was high on his agenda.

Nearly \$14 billion has been pledged by donors to rebuild the affected regions since the disaster, which drove 2 million people from their homes, deprived 1.5 million of their livelihoods and destroyed some 400,000 houses worldwide.

But hundreds of thousands of survivors are still living in substandard shelters without adequate health care, said the report, based on visits to more than 50,000 people in Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and India in November 2005.

Besides Indonesia's case on women rights, the report highlighted discrimination in aid distribution, government-backed land grabs and arbitrary arrests in the four other countries.

In Sri Lanka, where the tsunami hit communities already affected by the island's two-decade long civil war, aid workers say aid distribution sometimes deepened existing divisions between minority Tamils and Muslims and the majority Sinhalese.

"In some villages, you see someone who has been affected by the tsunami and they're getting lots of aid while in the same village you get someone who is war affected, who has spent 20 years without a house, gets nothing," one aid worker said. Chris Lom from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Bangkok said it was obvious many people would suffer long-term privations as a result of such a massive disaster — but that governments were not exclusively to blame.

"The horrible situation is that, yes, there are still a lot of people living in tents. But it was a jolt to everybody how unprepared they were — not just the governments," he said.

[Additional reporting by Telly Nathalia in Jakarta, Ed Cropley in Bangkok and Peter Apps in Colombo.]

Students protest omissions in Aceh draft law

Detik.com - February 1, 2006

Nur Raihan, Banda Aceh — The Acehnese Alliance of Private College Student Executive Councils (BEM PTS) believes that the Draft Law on a Government for Aceh that was submitted to the to the House of Representatives by the Home Affairs Department has disappointed the Acehnese people.

How is it that a number of extremely important points have been omitted such as the removal of the opportunity for independent candidates to participate in the coming election of regional heads.

In order to protest this, the alliance even organised a demonstration. The action was held in front of the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque in the Simpang Lima area and at the offices of the Aceh Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) on

Wednesday February 1. Demonstrators called on the central government not to destroy and emasculate the rights and aspirations of the Acehnese people.

The other article they say has been tinkered with by the Home Affairs Department is the one that specifies the demarcation of Aceh's borders in accordance with the July 1, 1956 agreement. In addition to this they are urging that the sharing of economic benefits also refer to the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding and that Aceh's entire regional revenue be managed by the Acehnese government.

The deputy speaker of the DPRD, Raihan Iskandar — who met with students in the grounds of the DPRD building — said that there are indeed several issues that need to be straightened out in the draft law. "For example on the demarcation of borders, after it was checked with the central government, there is no state gazette that refers to this matter. We have also looked in the Syiah Kuala University Faculty of Law [archives], it's also not there. But what is important, is that Aceh essentially remains as it is now. We will continue the struggle", he said.

Meanwhile the head of the special commission that drafted the law, Azhari Basar, explained that they would continue to struggle so that the law is in accordance with the hopes of the Acehnese people that we still see as tied to sectoral laws. But we will struggle for the draft law [not to be amended]", he said.

Basar along with other members of the DPRD will also be meeting with a number of leaders of political parties and public figures. "So that that they support the draft that we submitted", explained Basar — who is also the head of the Golkar Party fraction in the DPRD — when speaking to journalists after meeting with the students.

Basar explained that in his meeting with the vice president not long ago, independent candidates were to be accommodated in the draft law however they will only be given one chance to participate in the election of regional heads. "We do not want our rights to be predicated by the central [government] whereas there had already been prior discussion [on the matter]. Don't let the peace process be destroyed again by the central

government", he asserted. (nrl)

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Student oppose removal of articles in draft law

Aceh Kita - February 1, 2006

Adi W and Radzie, Banda Aceh — Hundreds of students from the Acehnese Alliance of Private Collage Student Executive Councils (Aliansi BEM PTS Aceh) held a demonstration on Wednesday February 1 protesting the central government's removal of a number of crucial articles in the Draft Law on a Government for Aceh (RUU-PA).

The students from eight private colleges had been gathering at the City Park in front of the Baiturrahman Great Mosque since 9am. After the demonstrators had all arrived, the students marched off in the direction of the Simpang Lima roundabout guarded by personnel from the Banda Aceh municipal police.

The demonstrators brought a number of banners that protested the Department of Home Affairs distortion of around 37 articles from the draft law that was submitted by the Aceh Regional House of Representatives (DPRD), the provincial government, the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and Acehnese society. One large banner read "Central government don't emasculate the aspirations of the Acehnese people in the RUU-PA".

After giving speeches at the Simpang Lima roundabout, demonstrators then moved off to the Aceh DPRD located on Jalan Teungku Muhammad Daud Beureu-eh. There they were greeted by Azhari Basar and Raihan Iskandar from the Special Committee XVIII that formulated the draft law after conducting a test of its worthiness and accommodating the aspirations of GAM and Acehnese society.

Riswan Haris, the president of the Acehnese Muhammadiyah University Student Government, said that the desires of the Acehnese people that were recorded in the draft law and submitted by the Acehnese legislator to Jakarta must be included without distortion. "All of the articles that were

removed must be reinserted, because these represent the aspirations of Acehnese society as a whole", he said in a speech.

A similar sentiment was conveyed by Aliansi BEM PTS coordinator Zirhan. According to Zirhan, the students reject the unilateral revisions carried out by the central government to the draft law.

"[If] not all of it is applied, it will be in serious contradiction with the aspirations of the Acehnese people", he said.

Zirhan said that Acehnese students are determined to monitor all of the stages of the discussion on the draft law that is currently at the national House of Representatives (DPR). If the government does not immediately reinsert the articles that were removed, the students will put pressure on the government. "We will continue monitoring", he said adding that this demonstration is the first action held to oversee the discussions on the draft law in parliament.

Basar meanwhile said that the draft that they submitted to Jakarta represents a commitment by Acehnese society as a whole and is in accordance with the points agreed to by GAM and the Indonesian government in the Helsinki memorandum of understanding. "We will continue the struggle", he said. "Such as independent candidates, we will continue defend this for the sake of the peace process in Aceh".

He promised to try to straighten out these problems with the central government. Members of the Aceh council are currently discussing the removal of the articles from the draft law and will later depart for Jakarta and meet with Acehnese members of the DPR. "We will continued to endeavor that the draft law is not ruined by the central [government]", said Iskandar before the assembled students.

As reported by Aceh Kita, Teuku Kamaruzzaman, one of the members of the team that formulated the draft law from GAM, has admitted his surprise after finding out that many articles in the draft law submitted by the DPRD, GAM and Acehnese civil society were trimmed down by the central government. "Now, after we had evaluated the draft that was then submitted [to the government] why has it suddenly been trimmed down like this", said

Kamaruzzaman at a press conference in Banda Aceh on the afternoon of Monday February 1. "We object to this".

There are 37 articles in the draft law submitted to the DPR that are considered crucial and were scratched out by the government. Other changes that have been protested by GAM are those to Article 144 on the authority of the Acehese government to calculate and determine the central government and the Acehese government's share of state revenue that comes from natural resources, oil and gas and other sources. According to Ampon Man, the removal of this article indicates that the distribution and calculation of natural resource revenue will still be regulated by the central government.

In addition to this, the draft law submitted by the government to the DPR states that the national general allocation funds (DAU) to be provided by the government over a period of ten years would only be one percent. Whereas in the draft law that was submitted by Aceh it referred to a permanent DAU of as much as five percent. [dzie]

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Activists decry illegal fees for Aceh-bound timber

Jakarta Post - February 1, 2006

Tb. Arie Rukmantara, Jakarta — Activists demanded Monday that North Sumatra authorities put a stop to illegal fees imposed during transportation of imported timber from Medan to Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam.

They said the shaking down of volunteers would erode international donor confidence in Indonesia and delay the reconstruction of the province from the devastating tsunami of Dec. 26, 2004.

Ramadhana Lubis from the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) told The Jakarta Post trucks transporting imported timber were forced to pay up to Rp 7 million (about US\$747) in total at 27 security checkpoints between the North Sumatra port of Belawan and Aceh regency of Meulaboh. He added the amount was almost the same as the truck

rental of Rp 8 million.

"Volunteers pay the fees because they do not want to see their work delayed, although they know they will find it difficult to account for it in their financial reports," he said. NGO sources say the practice involves police officers, military personnel and forest police at security checkpoints.

National Police spokesman Brig. Gen. Anton Bahrul Alam said his office had not received any official report about illegal fees. "Any officers caught red-handed will be arrested," he said.

WWF Aceh program coordinator Nana Fitriana Firman said she reported the practice to the Aceh-Nias Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Agency (BRR). "BRR is just as confused as we are. They don't know what to do. As an agency directly under the President, it should have the power to eliminate the practices," she said.

Nana feared the demanding of illegal fees would lead to a slowdown in reconstruction because local supplies were insufficient. "BRR is determined to speed up the reconstruction from 2006 to 2007, but how could this happen if the illegal practices are not stopped?"

BRR director of donor and international relations Heru Prasetyo claimed the agency had no authority to stop the practice. "We have already reported the problem to National Police chief Gen. Sutanto," he said.

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Oxfam and French-based Premiere Urgent are the biggest organizations importing timber among the many helping in the reconstruction. BRR estimates Aceh's reconstruction will need about 1 million cubic meters of wood to build 120,000 houses from 2005 through 2009.

The policy to import wood is meant to help conserve local forests amid rampant illegal logging. Indonesia loses about 3 million hectares in annual deforestation, mostly caused by illegal logging, official statistics shows.

WEST PAPUA

Foreign media ban in Papua to be maintained: Juwono

Agence France Presse - February 6, 2006

Jakarta — Indonesia will maintain a ban on foreign media reporting from its easternmost province of Papua to prevent an escalation of tension in the restive region, Minister of Defense Juwono Sudarsono said Monday.

The ban has been in place since 2003 in Papua, where a low-level guerrilla war has been simmering since Indonesia assumed control of the former Dutch territory in the 1960s.

"We feel that Indonesian unity and cohesion would be threatened by foreign 'intrusion and concern'," Juwono told a press conference attended by foreign correspondents. "There is a balance between international concern and sovereignty that we want to strengthen very peacefully," he said.

Juwono said reporters traveling to the jungle-clad province could heighten tensions between ethnic Papuans and migrants from outside Papua who make up a significant proportion of the province's population. Reporters could be "used as a platform" by Papuans to publicize the alleged abuses, he added.

Juwono admitted that some cases of killing, rapes and abuses by some soldiers had occurred but said Jakarta was working hard to minimize violations.

A sporadic, low-level separatist insurgency has rumbled on in Papua for decades, with international rights groups and activists saying the military has committed widespread human rights abuses against Papua's indigenous population.

Separatists proclaimed the state of West Papua on Dec. 1, 1961, but Indonesia took control of the mountainous, jungle-clad territory from Dutch colonizers the following year. It was formally annexed in 1969.

Defense minister admits some rights abuses in Papua

Voice of America - February 6, 2006

Nancy-Amelia Collins, Jakarta — The Indonesian defense minister has acknowledged that some military and police personnel have committed rights abuses in the eastern province of Papua. He says, however, any abuses are not part of a systematic policy.

Indonesian Defense Minister Juwarno Sudarsono told journalists Monday what human rights groups have been saying for years — that some members of the police and military are committing human rights abuses in Papua.

"I grant that there's been incidence of some brutality and torture and rape involving some of our troops, but there's a tendency to blanket all this into a notion that all of those are efforts of systematic and institutional," he said.

Juwarno made the remarks in response to questions about 43 Papuans, who fled to Australia last month seeking asylum.

The group accuses the Indonesian government of genocide against the people of Papua. While Australia has yet to decide their fate, the Indonesian government has asked that the asylum-seekers be sent home.

Separatists in Papua, formerly known as Irian Jaya province, have been fighting for an independent state in a low-level insurgency since the former Dutch colonial power ceded control to Indonesia in 1963.

Rights groups have long accused the Indonesian military and police of committing abuses against civilians as they fought insurgents.

Juwarno also defended a de facto ban on foreign journalists wanting to visit Papua. Visits are rarely allowed. The defense chief says his government thinks visits by foreign journalists disrupt national unity, and stir up separatists.

"Your role as a magnetic attraction to Papuans of all stripes of political and ethnic sense of identity will create this sense of danger among people from outside Papua that the foreigners are trying to instill a sense of division, by creating

human rights standards, which you feel are important for you, but also for Papuans," he said.

Juwarno warned foreign journalists not to take chances of trying to enter the province without permission. "My concern is that some overzealous police or military will mishandle you, manhandle you. That's a big problem for us," he said.

The defense minister says the government will issue guidelines to foreign companies in Indonesia, seeking military protection for their operations. The US mining company, Freeport-McMoRan, has been accused of illegally paying millions of dollars to security forces to guard a mine in Papua.

Juwarno says the new guidelines will entail all payments being made voluntarily, and through a civil agency, such as the Ministry of Minerals and Mines.

West Papuans 'must escape killing'

The Australian - February 6, 2006

Greg Roberts — The number of people crossing illegally from the Indonesian province of West Papua into Australia may be much greater than was thought.

"All the time there are Papuans coming over in the small boats to the Torres Strait islands," said Evrardus Kaise, a refugee from the strife-torn province who works as a meatworker in Ipswich, west of Brisbane. "People have to get away from the killing and everything else by the Indonesians."

The arrival of 43 Papuan asylum-seekers in a boat on Cape York Peninsula two weeks ago has unsettled relations between Canberra and Jakarta, with John Howard rejecting demands from Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono for their immediate return.

The Prime Minister has told Dr Yudhoyono that applications for refugee status from the Papuans, who are in the Christmas Island detention centre, will be processed in accordance with Australian laws and Australia's international treaty

obligations.

Mr Kaise said it was not unusual for Papuans to cross the Indonesia-Papua New Guinea border before crossing to Australia, as he had done.

He fled his village, near Merauke in West Papua, in 1987 to a refugee camp in PNG. He then took a boat to Australia's Saibai Island, just a few kilometres from the southern PNG coast. "The Indonesian military is torturing our people," Mr Kaise said. "They robbed us of our land, they stole our country. They still do these things."

Mr Kaise worked as a cray fisherman in the Torres Strait before being granted permanent residency in 1995. "I would be dead if I stayed there. I hope the Government will be kind to the ones who are here now."

Saibai Island Council chairman Jensen Warusam said because Australia's treaty with PNG allowed the movement of PNG nationals through Torres Strait waters, it was difficult to identify West Papuans. "They can come over the border and we do not always know about it," Mr Warusam said. "We have a lot of sympathy for these Papuans. They are our fellow Melanesians."

The Immigration Department said 25 officers were deployed to deter illegal immigrants in the Torres Strait. "Someone from West Papua is treated the same as an unauthorised person from any other country," a department spokesman said.

On Christmas Island, the 43 asylum-seekers have been interviewed and the initial screening process has been completed. A decision on their fate is expected later this month.

Ball in Australia's court in asylum case

Agence France Presse - February 5, 2006

Jakarta — Indonesia on Sunday challenged Australia to prove that 43 boat people from troubled Papua province seeking asylum from Canberra are really fleeing persecution.

"It lays on the Australian government to prove that they are really being persecuted," said

Indonesia's Foreign Minister Hasan Wirayuda. "The ball is in the Australians' court."

The Papuans, who included pro-independence activists and their families, arrived in northern Australia last month after a five-day voyage in an outrigger canoe.

They said they feared death if returned to Papua, where a sporadic and low-level separatist insurgency has been going on for decades.

The group was taken to an immigration detention camp on Christmas Island, a remote Australian territory in the Indian Ocean.

Wirajuda said Indonesia had already stated that the asylum seekers were not being persecuted in Papua and were not being sought by the authorities. Police had guaranteed they would not be harmed should they return home.

If Canberra decided to accord them asylum, he said, "Australia should have the conviction, beyond reasonable doubt, that they are people who are being persecuted because of their political or religious belief or their race.

"We do not want our relations with Australia, which have already developed well, to be disturbed by this problem," he added.

Papuans and human rights groups have accused Indonesian authorities of widespread abuses in the remote province, a former Dutch colony that Indonesia took over in the 1960s.

Indonesia won sovereignty over Papua, then called West Irian, in 1969 after the UN allowed an integration referendum with a public show of hands by a few hundred hand-picked tribal leaders. Critics labelled the vote a sham.

Indonesia pressures government on boat people

Australian Associated Press - February 6, 2006

Indonesia has ramped up pressure on the Howard government not to grant asylum to 43 Papuan boat people, with a senior minister denying that human rights abuses are systemic in the troubled

province.

The Papuans case is threatening to intensify into a diplomatic row with a series of Indonesian leaders, from the president down, insisting that Canberra should send the group back.

Defence Minister Juwono Sudarsono challenged claims by the group of pro-independence activists of repression by Indonesian security forces.

"These were not asylum seekers because of internal repression by our police or military," he told foreign journalists. "But we find it difficult to persuade the media — international versus local — because this is a very popular notion about repression by the cruel Javanese over the poor Papuans for the past 15 years."

Sudarsono, a civilian who has pushed reform within Indonesia's military, said the issue should not harm growing defence ties, including the imminent resumption of training between Australian and Indonesian special forces soldiers.

Sudarsono is the third senior Indonesian official to pressure Australia in recent days, echoing the views of Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Yudhoyono has telephoned Prime Minister John Howard to promise the Papuans would not be harmed if returned.

The Papuans have been taken to an immigration detention camp on Christmas Island, an Australian territory just south of Java, while their claims are being assessed.

Sudarsono admitted there had been sporadic incidents of violence against separatists but denied it was policy driven.

"I grant there have been incidents of some brutality and torture and rape involving some of our troops," he said. "But there is a tendency to blanket or insinuate that all these incidents are systemic." He said Mr Howard had been "persuaded" the group should be returned as soon as possible, he said.

"But of course its very difficult, because once it's in the hands of the immigration officers in Australia, then Australian law must operate on the ground there," Sudarsono said. "I don't think it will destruct relations between defence ministries." The Papuans arrived in

Australia last month after a five-day voyage in an outrigger canoe.

Sударsono said reports from human rights groups that Indonesian army and police numbers in Papua were being almost doubled with an additional 15,000 soldiers to help crack down on separatists were nonsense.

The cash-strapped military could not even pay for an additional headquarters unit, let alone a division-strong deployment in the sprawling province, which Jakarta won sovereignty over in 1969 following a UN referendum widely seen as rigged.

If he tried to divert money earmarked for critical new combat aircraft, ships and military housing, then Jakarta would be abusing the human rights of its own troops, who receive "inadequate pay for a very important job", Sudарsono said.

Instead of a draconian security crackdown, the way forward lay in stronger efforts by mainstream political parties to win the support of Papuan voters.

"Some people are already disillusioned with democracy and parliamentary politics, and even some have openly cried for a return of the military," Sudарsono said "So the ball is in the court of our friends in the political parties, to get organised, get real and get things done on the ground."

But in calling for a strengthening of democracy, Sudарsono also defended a de facto ban of foreign media visiting Papua, warning it would only harm efforts to build more "unity and cohesion" and give a platform to disgruntled separatists.

He said there were many Indonesians, including members of the country's powerful elite, who harboured deep suspicions that foreign nations including Australia, the US and the Netherlands wanted to break up Indonesia.

"Your role as a magnetic attraction to Papuans of all stripes of political as well as ethnic sense of identity will create this sense of danger among people from outside of Papua that foreigners are trying to instill this sense of division," he

said. "There is a clash of notions of human rights which I think you must understand."

Indonesia ups ante on Papuans

Melbourne Age - February 4, 2006

Tom Allard — Indonesia has stepped up its campaign for Australia to return 43 Papuan asylum seekers, with its new ambassador warning that relations will be strained if they are granted refugee status.

As Australia and Indonesia negotiate a new security treaty, the tensions over the arrival of the asylum seekers has been highlighted by a concerted effort at the highest levels of the Indonesian Government.

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono telephoned Prime Minister John Howard last week to offer his personal guarantee that the asylum seekers would not be harmed. Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda also made personal representations to Australia's ambassador in Jakarta, Bill Farmer.

The issue is also believed to have been discussed with high-ranking Indonesian military officials.

Yesterday Indonesia's ambassador to Australia, Hamzah Thayeb, offered his promise for the safety of the Papuan boat people, but also a warning that ties could be harmed.

Asked if the relationship could be hurt if the Australian Government granted the Papuans asylum, Mr Thayeb said: "I hope it will not, but it certainly would have an effect that's why we have to manage this together and find a solution."

He urged the group to begin a dialogue with Indonesian authorities and the Papuan People's Council about their grievances, something they could only do if they returned home.

The leader of the asylum seekers, Herman Wainggai, said this week that the Indonesian military was treating indigenous Papuans like animals. Mr Thayeb rejected that assessment. "We have changed fundamentally within ourselves," he told the ABC

yesterday.

Indonesia offered Papua special autonomy in 2001 in an effort to quell unrest from the Melanesian population of the resource-rich province. However, Mr Wainggai has described autonomy as a sham, and there have been numerous reports of the Indonesian military murdering and raping people and destroying villages since autonomy came into force.

Papua was controversially incorporated into Indonesia after a vote in 1969 overseen by the United Nations. However, only 1025 people hand-picked by the Indonesian authorities were allowed to vote. Reinforcing the dubious nature of the poll, the voters gave 100 per cent approval to become part of Indonesia.

Australian parliamentarians who met the asylum seekers on Christmas Island, where they are being assessed by officials from the Department of Immigration, believe they have legitimate claims to be refugees.

That support extends across the political spectrum, with National Party senator Barnaby Joyce yesterday voicing his sympathies and saying he believed the Papuans, who landed on Cape York Peninsula in far north Queensland, last month. "From my naive position, prima facie, they seem like they have a genuine claim," he said.

Indonesian Ambassador dismisses claims by Papuans

Radio Australia - February 3, 2006

Indonesia's new Ambassador to Canberra says relations between Australia and Indonesia will certainly be affected if Australia grants refugee status to more than 40 asylum seekers from the Indonesian province of Papua.

The group most of whom are men and activists arrived in northern Australia by canoe last month and are now held at Australia's remote Christmas Island detention centre in the Indian Ocean, waiting for a decision on their asylum claims. The leader of the Papua group on Christmas Island Herman Wainggai says he and the other independence

activists will be killed if they're sent home. But the new Indonesian Ambassador to Australia Hamzah Thayeb says there's no basis for the claims.

Presenter/Interviewer: Peta Donald

Speakers: Hamzah Thayeb Indonesian Ambassador to Australia

Hamzah Thayeb: We see no reason for them to seek asylum. And they are not in the criminal list from the police. They have not done any criminal action. They just can go back and the President already gives guarantee that they will, if they decide to return back, they can do so.

Peta Donald: Well, they have come here seeking asylum. They say that they would be killed if they returned to the Indonesian province of Papua. One of their leaders, Herman Wainggai, is quoted as saying that the Indonesian military and the militias are treating, that these people are being treated like animals.

Hamzah Thayeb: There's no truth in what he is saying, because, again, ever since the reform we have changed fundamentally within ourselves. And what Mr Wainggai is saying, I don't know where he gets these ideas.

In Papua, we have this special autonomy. And within that special autonomy, we have already mechanisms, especially the Papua People's Council. It is, the composition is they're all Papuans, so Wainggai, I would tell him to, if he's for dialogue, dialogue with them. Try to address all these issues.

Peta Donald: Nonetheless, these people say they're afraid to return. The Australian Government says their asylum cases will be considered on their merit. It's not going to take into account its relationship with Indonesia in considering the plans. It'll uphold its international obligations. What will Indonesia do if these asylum seekers are granted refugee status in Australia?

Hamzah Thayeb: Again, I must really emphasise we do not see any reason for them to seek asylum, because there's no reason. No reason.

Peta Donald: But they are seeking asylum, what

will you do if Australia grants them refugee status?

Hamzah Thayeb: That is for the Australian to, of course, to look into according to their own laws. But, as we see it, there's no reason for them to do so.

Peta Donald: Will it put a strain on the relationship if Australia does?

Hamzah Thayeb: I hope it will not, but it certainly would have an effect, that's why we have to manage this together and find a solution.

Papua students demand justice over Wagate shooting

Liputan6.com - February 4, 2006

Yogyakarta- Dozens of students from West Papua demonstrated at the intersection in front of the Yogyakarta central post office on Friday February 3.

The demonstration was held to express their concern over the Wagate shooting incident in the Tigi sub-district of the Paniai regency on January 20. They are demanding that the government of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Vice President Jusuf Kalla take responsibility for the incident in order that the victims and their families receive justice.

The students also demanded that the perpetrators of the shooting be tried in a human rights court and be dismissed from their posts. They consider the shooting to be a gross violation of human rights. The demonstration took place while a number of road construction workers in the village of Gakokebo were also raising questions about the wage payments.

The Wagate incident resulted in the death of Moses Douw, a Wagate state senior high-school student, and the wounding of three others. The perpetrator of the shooting, Infantry Second Lieutenant Situmeang who holds the post of the platoon commander of the Infantry Battalion Special Team 753/Arga Viratama and Police Second Brigadier Ronald Isac Tumena who is a member of the Wagate sectoral police have already been dismissed from

their posts. (TOZ/Tim Liputan 6 SCTV)

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Indonesian refugees were tortured

Associated Press - February 3, 2006

Sydney — Refugees who landed in Australia after a five-day sea voyage had been jailed and tortured in Indonesia, an Australian lawmaker said Friday, as Jakarta's ambassador warned of strained relations if they are granted asylum.

Barnaby Joyce, a high profile lawmaker from the ruling coalition who met with the 43 people from the restive Indonesian province of Papua, said the group appeared to have a genuine asylum claim and had been persecuted because of their Christian beliefs.

"There are documented cases of members within their families being shot," he told reporters after meeting with the refugees at an immigration processing facility on Australia's Indian Ocean territory Christmas Island, where they were transferred after landing on the northern coast of Queensland state on Jan. 18.

"There's certainly on the record experiences of them being jailed and tortured so I think they would be under risk if they went back," he said, noting that he had only met with them briefly.

But Indonesia's Ambassador to Canberra, Teuku Mohammad Hamzah Thayeb, repeated earlier warnings by Indonesian officials that granting the group asylum could strain relations between the two countries.

"It certainly would have an effect. That's why we have to manage this together and find a solution," Thayeb told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. radio on Friday.

The group, which includes seven children, arrived carrying a banner accusing Indonesia of terrorism and genocide in the province, where a poorly armed separatist movement has battled Jakarta's rule for decades.

Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone said the group had not yet officially applied for refugee status, but would be given "a fair hearing" if they file an asylum claim.

"If they ask for protection we will consider the claim appropriately and if it is appropriate to offer it, we will offer it," Vanstone told reporters late Thursday.

Joyce said the group of native Papuans were Christian, which meant they are ethnically, religiously and politically isolated after an influx of Indonesians to the province.

The group appeared to be decent and have a genuine claim, he said. "It's very hard to tell from a brief meeting and you can look a bit foolish if you make a statement and then you find out that they robbed a bank," he said.

Indonesia's Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda has said the group has nothing to fear if they return to Papua.

Indonesian troops have been repeatedly accused of rights abuses in Papua province, which was taken over by Jakarta in 1963. About 100,000 Papuans - one-sixth of the population — have died in military operations on the half-island province about 3,700 kilometers east of Jakarta.

Dozens reported dead in Papua dysentery outbreak

Jakarta Post - February 3, 2006

Nethy Dharma Somba, Jayapura — A dysentery outbreak has killed dozens of local residents in the remote Papuan regency of Puncak Jaya in the past two months, a reverend said Thursday.

"Dozens are reported to have died in the outbreak between December and January after coming down with dysentery," Seblum Karubaba, chairman of Kemah Injil Church Synod, told The Jakarta in Jayapura.

Coordinator of the Papua Health Crisis Center Paminto Widodo, however, said he had not received any information or exact data about Seblum's claims.

"We will soon deploy representatives to the site, even though it is difficult to reach the area. But now there is a doctor — Dr. Mery — who has been stationed at Mulia public hospital in Puncak Jaya," he said.

Seblum said he received the information about the deaths from the chairman of Ilaga Barat parish Rev. Martinus Magai and spiritual adviser Daniel Lalong.

"Three days ago, on Dec. 31, they came to meet me to report their activities at their parish and at the same time revealed more about the disease outbreak," he said. "A retreat for women scheduled for Jan. 8 to Jan. 11 was postponed until next April because the participants were in mourning for the dead." He said the men told him that up to five people died in one kampong in a day, spreading fear in nearby Ilaga Barat and Ilaga Timur parishes.

"Incessant rainfall for days led to the outbreak, where local residents frequently had bloody diarrhea before they died," Seblum said. He added he would send a letter of complaint to the regional authorities about their negligence in not handling the outbreak.

He said the reported deaths showed the government was not serious in giving adequate services to residents in remote areas. "The public's money has not been properly utilized to empower them," he said.

Paminto explained he knew nothing of the incident. "No extraordinary incident was reported. One or two deaths in one day is still unexceptional. But we'll await accurate data from our health officials," he said.

Ilaga district is accessible in 45 minutes by Cessna or Twin Otter airplanes from Wamena, but it takes only 25 minutes from Mulia. Puncak Jaya Regent Elieser Renmaur and health officials are currently visiting Ilaga district to ascertain the extent of the outbreak.

Most locals reject Papua split: MRP

Jakarta Post - February 2, 2006

Ridwan Max Sijabat, Jakarta — The Papua People's Council (MRP) is stepping up its opposition to Jakarta's policy to split Papua, saying a recent survey found most people object to the plan.

MRP chairman Agus Alue Alua said The council had conducted a survey to find out what people's views were on the controversial policy to set up the new West Irian Jaya province.

According to the 2001 law on special autonomy for Papua, any division of the territory requires the approval of the MRP, the provincial legislature and the governor.

In a telephone interview with The Jakarta Post last week, Agus said that MRP officials conducted a series of public meetings throughout West Papua. The large majority of respondents, made up of people from women's groups, the church, tribal assemblies and non-governmental organizations, all expressed their strong opposition to the plan, he said. Neither had any of the respondents ever been involved in the decision-making process, he said.

"Most respondents, in the provincial capital of Manokwari and in all the regencies, reject the new province. They said the province was established by Jakarta with the support of a few local politicians who would gain politically and economically from it," Agus said.

He knew of only between 10 and 20 government officials who supported the creation of the new province. "The Papuan people don't see any urgency to form a new province. They want the government to prioritize other important issues, such as (resolving) human rights abuses, the widening gap between indigenous people and migrants and rampant corruption among local officials," he said.

Papuans want to directly elect a governor for the whole province to replace JP Solossa, who died of heart attack last month, he said.

Following up last November's meeting with Papuan leaders to set up the MRP, Vice President Jusuf Kalla on Jan. 9 asked the MRP, the provincial legislature and the governor to vote for the creation of West Irian Jaya by mid-May.

In November's meeting, Jakarta and some Papuan

leaders agreed to sign a government regulation in lieu of law, or Perpu, which would provide a legal basis for the establishment of the new province. The Perpu has provoked widespread protest in Papua and is yet to be enforced.

The central government insists that the split is necessary to better manage the large territory. However, its critics say the policy goes against the special autonomy law and is unconstitutional. In an odd decision, the Constitutional Court agreed with the critics in November 2004, but ruled the creation of West Irian Jaya should go ahead anyway.

Papuan political observer Frans Maniagassi and Cendrawasih University social scientist Agus Sumule in Manokwari said Jakarta should consider the results of the MRP's public consultation. They said Papuans would be more likely to press ahead with demands for a self-determination referendum if Jakarta continued to insist on dividing the province.

Concern for West Papuans' safety

Green Left Weekly - February 1, 2006

Sarah Stephen — Among the 43 West Papuan asylum seekers who were transferred to Christmas Island on January 18 are four family groups. They are living in community detention, under close guard.

A family of West Timorese asylum seekers is living in the house next door to one occupied by a West Papuan family but, according to refugee advocate Kaye Bernard, the West Timorese have been told by the Global Solutions Limited (GSL) guards not to talk to the West Papuans.

Bernard told Green Left Weekly that a West Papuan father and son were flown to Perth on January 20 with suspected tuberculosis. The father has since been released into the community, but the son remains in hospital. Bernard pointed out that this exposes the claim by the immigration department (DIMIA) that it conducted thorough health checks before it flew the asylum seekers to Christmas Island as a lie.

"It's an example of the ongoing bulldust put out by the government. The health checks at Weipa were totally inadequate", Bernard explained. She argued that DIMIA wanted to get the asylum seekers to Christmas Island as quickly as possible and cut whatever corners it needed to.

Bernard has serious concerns about the use of the Christmas Island processing and reception centre to detain asylum seekers for long periods. She visited, and campaigned for the release of, 43 Vietnamese asylum seekers detained there from 2003 to 2005.

"It was designed as a transitional facility for people intercepted at sea", she said. "The facilities aren't there for anything beyond what a GP can provide." Greens Senator Kerry Nettle, planning a visit to the island on January 29, wasn't given approval to meet with the West Papuans until a few days beforehand.

DIMIA tried hard to find a pretext to bar her from contact with the asylum seekers. First, it argued that the asylum seekers weren't properly health cleared — an embarrassing admission that the department hadn't followed protocols in Weipa.

Second, it claimed that not all the asylum seekers had completed their primary interviews. Yet on January 27 DIMIA admitted that all interviews had been finalised.

The final barrier, which may yet prevent Nettle from speaking directly to the asylum seekers, is the requirement that her name be on the asylum seekers' visitors list, a bizarre catch-22 requirement since the asylum seekers cannot put Nettle's name on their "list" unless they know she's coming.

To date, DIMIA and GSL have barred all supporters, including Australia West Papua Association members, from speaking with the West Papuans.

Refugee advocates are very concerned about the safety and well-being of the West Papuans. According to a January 26 Project SafeCom media release, Australia West Papua Association member Ned Byrne confirmed that a priest in the West Papuan town of Wamena, who was the first political prisoner in West Papua and whose three children

are among those who sailed to Australia two weeks ago, has been approached by Indonesian officials with a list of names and asked to confirm that they were on the boat that made it to Australia. The priest felt he had no choice but to confirm the list of names.

Indonesian officials have already tried to gain access to the asylum seekers. On January 18, officials travelled to Weipa to check up on the West Papuans who had just arrived.

It was rumoured that DIMIA gave them access to the asylum seekers, but the department claims that a junior delegation from the Indonesian consulate arrived just a few hours too late. Even if this is true, Bernard points out that their efforts to access the asylum seekers were completely outside diplomatic protocols, unless the Australian government had given them the green light.

It appears likely that, if Indonesian authorities haven't already been given access to the West Papuans, Australian authorities will happily allow them in to interrogate the asylum seekers at some stage.

This is what happened to a family group of seven West Timorese asylum seekers who reached land north of Broome on November 5. They presented themselves to authorities to claim asylum and were taken to Christmas Island after being hidden in Darwin for 10 days.

Bernard, who has spoken with one of the West Timorese men, was told by him that DIMIA officers repeatedly asked whether any of the family wanted access to their embassy. They said no, and explained that this was from whom they were fleeing.

On their third day of detention they were told, "We're now going to let Indonesian embassy officials in to see you. They just want to have a look at you." The Indonesian officials questioned them about their names and where they had come from. The family was frightened and in tears, but said nothing.

Bernard says that she was told by an ABC reporter that DIMIA had informed journalists that two of the West Papuans on Christmas Island has asked for

Indonesian consular access. Such claims possibly lay the groundwork for a visit by consular staff.

All the asylum seekers now held on Christmas Island — eight West Timorese and 43 West Papuans — have come to Australia fleeing Indonesian authorities. Bernard said it is incredible that, of all the places they could be detained, the Australian government deems it appropriate to hold them in an offshore detention centre that's five times closer to Indonesia than it is to Australia.

The Project SafeCom media release echoes this point: "The fact that DIMIA has placed Papuan families, men, women and children in staff housing, openly visible from the beach on Christmas Island, places them, as well as their families and relatives in West Papua, in a direct line of fire and in direct danger of being identified by Indonesians", who are able to travel freely to Christmas Island, only 400 kilometres from the coast of Java, under the guise of tourists.

As an aside, Bernard pointed out that the eighth West Timorese man being held on Christmas Island arrived by boat near northern Queensland some time in 2005. She said it was only by chance that she noticed the change in the detention figures, indicating one new arrival on the island. Bernard made sure he received legal assistance but wonders if anyone would have known of his existence if she hadn't pursued the issue. It is a chilling example of the way the Christmas Island detention centre can be used to "disappear" people, she said.

Bernard told GLW: "The West Papuans shouldn't be treated any differently from other asylum seekers. All people seeking asylum should be treated with the utmost respect."

West Papua: Genocide continues

Green Left Weekly - February 1, 2006

Kerryn Williams — The arrival on Australian shores of 43 West Papuan refugees on January 18 has put the spotlight on the long suffering — and determined resistance — of the people of West Papua.

For more than two centuries West Papua was a Dutch colony. After Indonesia became an independent republic in 1949, a dispute flared over West Papua's fate. The Netherlands argued that Papua was a separate geographic and ethnic entity from Indonesia, with its own national character, and prepared for self-determination for the territory. The newly elected West New Guinea Council took office on December 1, 1961, adopting the Morning Star national flag and a national anthem.

This was the "unmistakable beginning of the formation of a Papuan state", according to a report, released in November, that was commissioned by the Dutch government to investigate the period.

However Indonesia, determined to control West Papua, began small-scale military incursions in 1962, using arms supplied by the US. In August that year, UN-sponsored negotiations between Indonesia and the Netherlands — from which the West Papuan people were excluded — resulted in the New York Agreement. This placed Papua under temporary UN administration before handing over control to Indonesia.

Sham ballot In 1969, the UN oversaw the farcical "Act of Free Choice", in which just over 1000 West Papuans, selected by the Indonesian military, "voted" unanimously — out of a population of some 800,000. At gunpoint, and in open meetings rather than by secret ballot, they "agreed" to remain under Indonesian rule.

A December 9 bulletin issued by Tapol, the Indonesian Human Rights Campaign, quotes Michel Pelletier, one of the UN observers sent to West Papua in 1968 to monitor implementation of the New York Agreement. He described their role as "superficial", because the Indonesian military were "hovering over the whole thing", restricting the observers' movements, and preventing them from investigating allegations of human rights violations and from witnessing the many protests by West Papuans opposed to Indonesian rule. The UN team was forced to leave as soon as the Act of Free Choice was over. Nevertheless, the UN ratified the result on November 19 of that year.

The Dutch report described the Act of Free Choice as a "sham", noting that by the time the

Netherlands' rule ended "the first signs of the violent action taken by the Indonesian military, which would also characterise the new administration in the coming decades, soon appeared. Rapid impoverishment ensued, together with a substantial decline in legal certainty and a loss of civil rights across the board." From 1969 until October 1998 (five months after the overthrow of former Indonesian military dictator President Suharto), West Papua was designated as a "military operations zone", giving the military free reign to combat the resistance movement. Some 100,000 people have died during the Indonesian occupation.

In May 1981, the Tribunal on Human Rights in West Papua, held in Papua New Guinea, heard from Eliezer Bonay, Indonesia's first governor of the territory, that some 30,000 West Papuans had been murdered during 1963-69.

Free Papua Movement Since its formation in 1965, the Free Papua Movement (OPM) has led armed resistance to the Indonesian occupation. A 2001 Human Rights Watch report, Violence and Political Impasse in Papua, noted: "In the three years since [Suharto] fell... a broad, civilian-based Papuan independence movement has emerged along side the guerrilla fighters and, for the first time, poses a serious challenge for Indonesia".

In February 2000, 400 delegates met to discuss how to win independence, then 3000 delegates met for a congress in May-June.

"Special autonomy" legislation was adopted in September 2001, giving an element of self-rule and returning a greater proportion of taxes and royalties to West Papua. But in early 2003, under an Indonesian presidential regulation, this autonomy was undermined by the partition of West Papua into three provinces, involving the creation of new provincial military commands. A new province, West Irian Jaya, was created.

In 2001, Papuan Presidium Council leader Theys Hiyo Eluay was murdered by military personnel. The soldiers responsible received jail sentences of just two years.

In 2003, the Indonesian military launched a terror campaign in the highlands, raiding and burning

villages, assaulting, raping, torturing and executing villagers, and displacing hundreds of people.

A key site of conflict is the giant gold and copper mine operated by US company Freeport McMoran, which has been in operation since the 1970s.

According to the Vanuatu-based West Papuan People's Representative Office, in a January 20 statement, "The presence of Freeport McMoran in West Papua has not brought any appreciable benefits to the people... Instead, the exploitation of the mine has wrought serious damage to the local culture, belief system, environment, social structure and political aspirations of the people... Freeport also promotes violence in the immediate region by providing funds in the millions of US dollars to the Indonesian military and security forces to maintain 'security' over the mine area, beside the US\$1 billion as annual dividend, paid last year to the Indonesian Government." Dr Otto Ondawame, international spokesperson for the OPM, said in the statement: "We cannot tolerate any more of these types of inhuman acts, and call upon the people of West Papua to take all necessary peaceful actions to close down the Freeport mine." On January 11, in a joint FBI-Indonesian police operation, 12 suspected OPM members were arrested at Timika near Freeport. They were accused of involvement in the 2002 murder of two US citizens near the mine. This is despite one of the US survivors supporting accounts of the killing that directly implicate the Indonesian military, and the principal suspect admitting his role in the attack as a member of a military-sponsored militia. Four of the 12 detainees are aged between 12 and 14 years.

The Indonesian daily Sinar Harapan reported on January 26 that a meeting in Jakarta on January 23 decided to increase troop numbers guarding Freeport mine.

Increasing military presence The Human Rights Watch World Report 2006 described "a significant build-up of troops in Papua" in 2005, "with reports of widespread displacement of civilians, arson and arbitrary detention in the central highlands region".

An August 2005 report by John Wing with Peter King from the University of Sydney Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, *Genocide in West Papua?*, found that "the [Indonesian] Republic's armed forces act as a law unto themselves with no real accountability for crimes against the Papuan population". On November 23, Tapol reported that Indonesia plans to double its forces in West Papua over the next five years and deploy a new division of special combat troops known as Kostrad.

On December 1, Tapol reported that it had uncovered a secret directive issued by West Papua's chief of police on November 10 threatening to charge anyone who protests on commemorative dates during November and December under Indonesia's anti-subversion laws, which carry a maximum sentence of life in prison. On December 1, 2004, two people were arrested for participating in a pro-independence demonstration in Jayapura and were sentenced to 10 and 15 years' jail.

On January 20, police shot and killed 15-year-old Moses Douw and seriously injured two others. Police claim security personnel fired on a crowd of protesters seeking authorisation to collect fees from motorists using a nearby road, after some of the protesters allegedly assaulted a police officer. However Benny Giay from the Indonesian human rights group Elsham Papua told the January 21 Sydney Morning Herald that the murder occurred when four students were ambushed on their way to school. Douw is a relative of one of the Papuan refugees currently detained on Christmas Island.

On January 23, Detik.com reported that protesters stormed the Papuan legislative council building in the provincial capital Jayapura, demanding the withdrawal of Indonesian troops from West Papua and calling for an independent investigation into the January 20 killings.

Australia's role Tom Benedetti from Canada's West Papua Action Network wrote in the January 2 International Herald Tribune that Indonesian military activity had been escalating in West Papua, and the number of troops there has reached an estimated 50,000.

Benedetti cited three major obstacles to peace in West Papua. The first is that "foreign journalists

and most researchers and aid workers are still banned from West Papua. Unlike in Aceh after the tsunami, no-one is looking." The second is that the Indonesian military "earns millions selling security services to resource companies such as the gold-mining company Freeport-McMoran". And finally, the majority of the Indonesian military's budget is funded from its own legal and illegal business ventures, and "West Papua is the Indonesian military's most lucrative area of operations".

The US and Australian governments have started to renew military ties with Indonesia, following a temporary suspension in 1999 when Jakarta-backed militias launched a violent rampage in the wake of East Timor's independence referendum.

The January 20 West Papuan People's Representative Office statement noted: "In the 1960s, the Government of the USA shamefully sold out West Papua as a bribe to Indonesia for its cooperation in halting the spread of communism in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The USA is now trading off West Papua to Indonesia once again in return for its cooperation in the struggle against international terrorism and Islamic extremism." Jacob Rumbiak from the West Papua National Coalition for Liberation told Radio Australia on January 23 that "human rights abuses and genocide [in West Papua] have been done by the government and military of Indonesia so... Australia has a responsibility to put pressure on Indonesia because training the military... and training facilities in Indonesia [are] supported by Australia."

Who are the asylum seekers?

Green Left Weekly - February 1, 2006

Sarah Stephen — One of the passengers aboard the outrigger canoe that landed on Cape York peninsula on January 18 was a five-year-old child.

Reminiscent of so many stories of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum, the boy's parents, high-profile West Papuan independence activists, were unable to escape and expect to die at the hands of the Indonesian military. To give their son some

chance of surviving, they put him on a boat to Australia.

Herman Wainggai, a prominent student activist in West Papua, is another of those seeking political asylum in Australia. Australia West Papua Association member Alex Rayfield interviewed Wainggai in 2001. Wainggai told him, "For over 40 years we have been living under pressure from the Indonesian military. Our heart is crying for independence."

In a January 25 article on the New Matilda website, Rayfield wrote: "Wainggai says he is deeply committed to the pursuit of West Papuan independence through nonviolent means. When I first interviewed him in 2001 he had just come out of four months' jail for organising and participating in a rally and flag raising. When I returned to West Papua in 2002 he was in jail again for another nonviolent action, and was not released until 2004.

The article also described the fate of Wainggai's uncle, Dr Thomas Wainggai. "On 14 December, 1988, Dr Wainggai, together with several hundred other West Papuans, participated in an illegal flag raising. He was arrested by the Indonesian authorities and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment. Several other leaders who helped organise the protest also received lengthy prison sentences. Dr Wainggai's Japanese-born wife was sentenced to six years' jail for simply sewing the flag used in the demonstration.

"Dr Wainggai died in prison in Jakarta in March 1996. The cause of his death is not known but many West Papuans suspect that he was murdered by the Indonesian military."

Protests: Let the West Papuan refugees stay!

Green Left Weekly - February 1, 2006

Australians protested around the country last week in solidarity with the 43 West Papuan refugees who have been detained by the federal government on Christmas Island. The protesters called on the government to immediately release the asylum seekers into the community and grant them

permanent refugee status in Australia.

In Canberra, Jude Morton reports, 120 people rallied in Garema Place on January 25 in a protest organised by the Refugee Action Collective, the Australia West Papua Association (AWPA) and the Socialist Alliance.

Speakers at the action called not only for the release of the asylum seekers, but also for an end to military ties between Canberra and Jakarta, and for a referendum in West Papua so that the people can decide their territory's future.

The wide range of speakers at the rally reflected the broad community support for the West Papuans. They included Andrew Hall from the Refugee Action Committee; Rose Costelloe from the AWPA; Gregor Henderson, president-elect of the Uniting Church; and Errol Ayamseba from the West Papuan community in Canberra. Costelloe spoke about the 40-year history of oppression in West Papua and called for the refugees to be released, not held incommunicado on Christmas Island.

Deb Foskey, Greens MLA, read a statement of support from Greens Senator Kerry Nettle, who is planning to meet with the refugees on Christmas Island. Nick Everett, the rally chair, read a message of support from Australian Democrats Senator Natasha Stott Despoja.

Anglican bishop George Browning also addressed the crowd before it marched to Liberal Senator Gary Humphries' office. There, a number of West Papuans spoke about the situation in their country and performed music. The protesters chanted "Refugees, freedom now! West Papua, freedom now!" and "We are Melanesian, not Indonesian!".

Humphries' office was contacted earlier to invite the senator to address the protest, but his staff declined saying that Humphries was on leave.

According to AWPA activists, Humphries is well informed about the human rights situation in West Papua. He should therefore be called on to lead a push within the Liberal Party to have the refugees immediately released.

Sashi Dharann reports from Melbourne that the AWPA organised a snap action on January 24 calling for

freedom for the asylum seekers and for West Papua.

One hundred and twenty people converged outside the immigration department office and listened to speakers from Melbourne's West Papuan community, the Greens, Action in Solidarity with Asia and the Pacific, and refugee-rights activist Pamela Curr.

Jacob Rumbiak, spokesperson for the West Papuan National Coalition for Liberation who is now resident in Melbourne, told Green Left Weekly, "Something has got to change in Canberra if we are to move forward in any way". He added that the Australian government "needs to relate to the people's struggles in Indonesia for democracy, and not just strengthen military ties".

After listening to the speakers, some of the demonstrators marched through the city to Federation Square. More actions are being planned to keep up the pressure on the federal government to free the asylum seekers and grant them permanent refugee status.

MILITARY TIES

Training 'won't endanger' Papuans

Sydney Morning Herald - February 2, 2006

Kylie Williams — The defence department has rejected a refugee group's claims that training Indonesian special forces troops will endanger West Papuan lives.

The Australia West Papua Association (AWPA) has called on the Department of Defence and new Defence Minister Brendan Nelson to rethink plans to train the Indonesian military, in particular special forces Kopassus.

Former defence minister Robert Hill announced in December that Australian forces would train Kopassus.

Refugee groups believe the shooting of four teenagers in Papua earlier this month was linked to a boatload of asylum seekers fleeing the Indonesian province and landing on the Australian mainland only days earlier.

The 43 Papuans are now on Christmas Island where their asylum claims are being assessed.

Joe Collins from the AWP said Kopassus had a history of human rights abuses in Papua and training from the Australian Defence Force would only worsen the situation.

"Without going into any great detail of its past history, Kopassus has been notorious for its role in human rights abuses in East Timor and West Papua," he said. "AWPA believes that it is untimely for our military to recommence co-operation with the Indonesian military."

But a spokesman for the defence department said that in the light of recent terrorist bombings, it was in Australia's best interests to engage with defence forces in our region.

"The bombings in Bali on 1 October, 2005, further highlight the need for regional countries to work together in combating this common threat," he said. He said the training would not include individuals or groups with past histories of human rights abuses.

Senator Hill said late last year that while there had been concerns about Kopassus and human rights abuses in the past, it had changed its ways.

End military ties with Indonesia

Green Left Weekly - February 1, 2006

Jon Lamb — The recent arrival of West Papuan asylum seekers in northern Australia and the restricted release of the United Nations-commissioned report from the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation on human rights abuses in East Timor have sparked renewed calls for an end to military ties with Indonesia. The Indonesian military (TNI) is also reported to be building up its troops in West Papua and carrying out actions to intimidate and attempt to crush the independence movement.

In 1999, the TNI-backed destruction of East Timor by pro-Jakarta militia resulted in a massive international backlash and protest movement, forcing Indonesia's closest allies — the US,

Australia and Britain — to suspend their supply of military training and equipment to the TNI.

These three nations have provided most of the training and resources the TNI needed to occupy East Timor for 24 years. Without their direct military assistance, especially the supply of state of the art weaponry, the subjugation of the East Timorese people could not have lasted as long as it did.

The protest and solidarity actions in 1999 in support of the East Timorese people's right to self-determination broke the decades-long "special relationship" between Western powers and the TNI.

Resuming military ties between these governments and the TNI was made contingent on achieving justice, bringing to account the numerous leading TNI officers and militia leaders responsible for gross human rights abuses and war crimes in East Timor. But since 1999, not a single leading TNI figure involved in implementing Indonesia's "scorched earth" policy in East Timor has been convicted and punished. On the contrary, many have been promoted within the TNI and/or pursued successful careers and business interests outside of the military.

General Adam Damiri, for example, who played a key role in orchestrating the terror campaign in East Timor, was promoted in December 1999 to operational assistant to the armed forces chief of staff in Jakarta, heading up operations within Aceh. Likewise, Colonel Timbul Silaen, head of the police in East Timor in 1999 (and in charge of security before the August 30 independence referendum) was promoted to brigadier general and head of the newly created police "anti-corruption" force. In late 2003, he was appointed as chief of police in West Papua, around the same time that East Timorese militia leader and indicted war criminal Eurico Guterres announced he was establishing anti-independence militias there.

A sham

The UN has consistently backed away from creating an international war crimes tribunal, despite recommendations for such a tribunal from its own International Commission of Inquiry, released in early 2000. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has

capitulated to concerted pressure from the US and its allies, declaring that the Indonesian government should be given the opportunity to establish its own inquiry and judicial process.

What has transpired has been a total sham. The ad hoc Human Rights Court, which from its inception in 2001 has been resolutely condemned by Indonesian human rights activists, including the government's own human rights body KPP-HAM, has been unable to implement any punitive action against those indicted and convicted for human rights abuses in East Timor. Silaen, for example, was acquitted, and Damiri had the charges against him overturned on appeal.

While there remains public concern within the US, Britain and Australia about resuming ties with the TNI, this concern has lessened following the 2001 terrorist attack in New York, and the bombings in Jakarta and Bali and more recently London. Both the George Bush and John Howard governments have justified the need to re-engage with the Indonesian military on the basis of the need to fight terrorism and the organisations in South-East Asia that are alleged to have links with groups like al Qaeda.

Shortly after the first bombing in Bali on October 12, 2002, Australia's then defence minister Robert Hill announced in parliament: "We are aware of the role that Kopassus has in relation to counter-terrorism responsibilities in Indonesia, and therefore it might well be in Australian interests to redevelop the relationship". The elite Kopassus regiment has been implicated in gross human rights abuses in Aceh, West Papua and East Timor.

In December 2005, Hill reiterated the importance of renewing links with Kopassus, under the guise of counter-terrorism operations, stating: "There will be occasions when the best response available is through Kopassus and we would like to see Kopassus trained to be as capable as possible." Within the framework of the "war on terror", the US and Australian governments have driven the process to normalise relations with the TNI. Over the last few years this has ranged from low-level officer training through to multilateral exercises, like last year's Exercise Kakadu, in which Indonesian naval vessels participated. Hill described Kakadu as a "major exercise in terms of regional engagement".

Last November the US State Department declared that it was overriding restrictions imposed by Congress on US military ties with Indonesia, on the basis of US national security. The British-based Indonesian human rights campaign Tapol described the decision as one that "will encourage the practice and expectation of military impunity, which remains a major obstacle to genuine democracy in Indonesia". While the cease-fire and negotiations in Aceh are holding for the moment, the present situation in West Papua highlights the fundamentally repressive role of the TNI, and is yet another example of why military ties with the TNI must be ended.

The number of Indonesian troops in West Papua is expected to double in the next five years, including detachments from the elite Kostrad forces. This will surely result in an increase in human rights abuses and repression across West Papua.

HUMAN RIGHTS/LAW

Women activists yell no to antiporn bill

Jakarta Post - February 6, 2006

Jakarta — Activists from several NGOs dealing with women's issues on Saturday came out against the much-debated pornography bill, which they claimed would repress women.

The bill, which was drafted in part to protect women from exploitation, would have the opposite effect of placing limits on women's expression and freedoms, the activists said.

"We have always acknowledged pornography as a disease that must be eradicated, but not through a repressive law," said Vivi Widyawati of the Mahardhika Women's Working Group.

The activists say a bill that limits and criminalizes women's sexuality would never bear fruit.

The draft, if passed, would lead to the establishment of the National Anti-Pornography Agency, which would have the authority to fine or arrest anyone it considered to be acting

"indecently" or violating the country's "moral code". "The law criminalizes the victims, the ones exploited by pornography, and not the ones who exploit them," said Vivi.

The NGOs fear the national agency, which the NGOs refer to as the "morality police", could be abused by the authorities to meddle in the private lives of citizens in the name of morality. "The government should make use of the laws we already have on the books (to stop pornography)," said Vivi.

She said the laws on child protection, human trafficking and the protection of witnesses, as well as the Criminal Code, already gave authorities the power they need to fight pornography.

Instead of passing this new draft, the NGOs urged the government to focus its efforts on introducing sex education programs in schools to teach children about sexuality, and limiting the distribution and access to pornography, both in the media and on the streets. "Early sex education is urgently needed to help people understand sexuality," said Mariana Amiruddin of Women's Journal Foundation.

The NGOs also believe the draft's definition of pornography is biased and out of line with already existing definitions. The groups themselves define pornography as the "business of sexually exploiting women for commercial purposes". A dictionary definition of pornography would be "the depiction of erotic behavior to cause sexual excitement".

The activists want the government's definition of pornography to contain several specific points, including that women are the main objects, or victims, of pornography, and that women are the victims of sexual abuse caused by pornography.

"There is no fair or effective way to categorize one's values or morality," said Vivi in discussing the moral values used by legislators as their guideline in drafting the pornography bill.

She said women who were drawn into pornography never became involved willingly, but were victims of exploitation. "The problem of victims being

pulled into pornography has always been due to multidimensional and multi-interpretational problems," said Vivi, adding that one of the factors included poverty.

The NGOs that united to denounce the pornography bill included Arus Pelangi, Institut Ungu, LBH Apik, Pokja Perempuan Mahardhika, Sekar, Srikandi Demokrasi Indonesia, the National Secretariat of Women's Coalitions and the Women's Journal Foundation, in addition to individuals also concerned by the issue.

"Societies that base themselves on patriarchal thoughts have always considered the woman's body as taboo," said Mariana from the Women's Journal Foundation. "We, women, have always been blamed for man's inability to restrain his sexual desires," she said.

Truth is, SBY 'too busy' for meeting

Jakarta Post - February 6, 2006

Tony Hotland and Tiarna Siboro, Jakarta — The government has been criticized for the slow process in the selection of members of the long-awaited Truth and Reconciliation Commission (KKR) tasked with resolving past gross human rights violations.

The selection process has been stalled at the presidential office for almost six months.

State Secretary Yusril Ihza Mahendra said President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono could not schedule a meeting as yet with the selection team of the KKR members, which had screened and submitted 42 names to him in August last year.

The President is to pick 21 of the 42 names before handing them over to the House of Representatives for endorsement.

The President issued a decree to establish the selection team only in April, when the commission itself should have been set up as required by the law on the KKR's establishment.

"The President wants to meet with the selection team first to hear their considerations and input

in the selection. But the President hasn't had the time due to his busy activities," said Yusril.

The selection team consists of officials from the Justice and Human Rights Ministry and several human rights activists.

The KKR is mandated to focus on revealing the truth behind the past human rights abuses during the New Order administration of Soeharto, and establishing a mechanism for reconciliation among the parties concerned.

Director of the Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (ELSAM) Ifdhal Kasim said the government had demonstrated a poor sense of justice given that it saw no urgency in revealing the truth and promoting reconciliation between the perpetrators of human rights abuse and their victims.

"The President had the time to travel the world, attend a lot of forums and events, even insignificant ones. But he has no time to meet the selection team here. Don't think that enforcing the law is only about corruption because reformasi is also about settling human rights violation cases," he said.

Ifdhal attributed the sluggish process to the President's indecision over political considerations since once the commission is officially established, its investigations may target senior military officials, including Yudhoyono's seniors.

"This is a challenge for him to draw the line between the old and new regime. There are consequences that it may implicate his seniors that he will have to face," he said.

Ifdhal's view was shared by legislator Sidharto Danusubroto, who led the House special committee that deliberated the KKR law, saying the government was most likely facing a dilemma.

"I sense that there's a strong resistance within the government since this commission and the idea behind it is a completely new thing within our history," he said.

He said truth-telling of history was not part of Indonesia's culture given that the official

version of history had always been told by those in power.

"There are still political innuendoes even as we speak on this KKR debate. I sense that the dilemma that the government is dealing with is quite the same with what we had when deliberating the law for 16 months," said Sidharto.

Selected names from the President will require endorsement from the House, which means more politics will be involved. The President will have to pick replacements if the House does not approve the names, thus it is hard to say when the truth shall be revealed.

Kontras: TNI does not support Muchdi

Tempo Interactive - February 6, 2006

Eko Nopiansyah, Jakarta — Edwin Partogi, the operational head of the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras), has said that retired Major General Muchdi Purwoprandjono's request to the Muslim Defender Team to assist him in the case of the murder of human rights activist Munir proves that the TNI (Indonesian military) does not support him.

"This is a positive signal that must be taken advantage of by the police to conduct the investigation", he said when contacted in Jakarta on Sunday February 5.

According to Partogi, the request for assistance from the Muslim Defender Team is an unusual affair. Usually the TNI assists its members who are affected by legal problems through the TNI's Legal Development Agency.

Partogi explain that what has become an obstacle in the investigation is that Purwoprandjono is that he is a former Kopassus general (elite special forces). Partogi suspects that with the involvement of the Muslim Defender Team the case will now be turned into a religious issue.

"Religious groups must pay close attention, is their position is in fact being profited from or actually taken advantage of?"

[Translated by James Balowski.]

House told to pursue Munir murder case

Jakarta Post - February 4, 2006

Jakarta — The House of Representatives must act to reveal the masterminds behind the murder of social justice campaigner Munir, rights groups say.

Non-governmental organizations grouped in the Action Solidarity Committee for Munir met with House leaders Friday. They urged legislators to question President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono about his commitment to resolving the murder case.

Munir's widow, Suciwati, who joined the committee, said the House was the "only hope" to push for a new investigation into the case. "We want the House to act," she said.

House deputy chairman Muhaimin Iskandar said legislators would continue their efforts to resolve the case.

Munir was found dead on board a Garuda flight traveling from Jakarta to Amsterdam in September 2004. A Dutch autopsy found a deadly amount of arsenic in the body.

A Garuda pilot, Polycarpus Budihari Priyanto, was recently convicted of the murder. Judges at his trial noted Polycarpus had made many calls to a deputy head of the State Intelligence Agency before the murder, leading many people to suspect the agency was involved.

New probe into Munir murder sought

Jakarta Post - February 2, 2006

Jakarta — The Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras) is calling for a further investigation into the murder of human rights activist Munir.

Kontras coordinator Usman Hamid said Wednesday that Munir's murder trial had ended in disarray, with judges handing down a questionable 14-year jail sentence to his convicted murderer,

Pollycarpus Budihari Priyanto.

Usman said Central Jakarta District Court judges had noted that Pollycarpus had made 41 phone calls to Muhdi Purwo Prandjono, a deputy head of the State Intelligence Agency (BIN), in the days prior to Munir's murder in 2004. However, neither the judges nor prosecutors did anything to follow up this evidence, he said.

The conversations give credence to allegations that Pollycarpus worked for BIN. "Now that the whole trial has ended up in confusion and the verdict has satisfied no one... the case should be investigated again from square one," Usman told Antara.

Both Pollycarpus' lawyers and the prosecutors have appealed the verdict.

CORRUPTION/COLLUSION/NEPOTISM

Antigraft, antimonopoly bodies join forces

Jakarta Post - February 7, 2006

Jakarta — The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and the Business Competition Supervisory Commission (KPPU) entered into a collaborative arrangement Monday to eliminate corruption and unfair competition in government and state-enterprise procurements.

The memorandum of understanding was signed by KPK director Taufiqurahman Ruki and KPPU director Syamsul Ma'arif at the KPPU headquarters in Jakarta.

Taufiqurahman said the MoU was regarded as being of major importance by the KPK as more than 70 percent of the cases investigated by the commission have involved unfair tenders in which officials and businesspeople colluded for their mutual enrichment.

Meanwhile, Syamsul expressed hope that with the signing of the MoU, his commission would be able to help the KPK eliminate corruption from government procurements.

"More than 90 percent of the unfair tenders we

have investigated have involved people other than business players, such as government officials and (procurement) committee members," he said, adding that the KPPU had no power to take action against non-business players.

He expressed the hope that after the signing of the MoU, the two commissions would be able to assist each other in implementing the 1999 Antimonopoly Law and the 2002 Anticorruption Law.

"The KPK will follow up on our findings of involvement by corrupt officials in unfair procurements and tenders," he said.

A World Bank report found that between 10 and 50 percent of corruption cases in Indonesia involved government procurements of goods and services.

Indonesian Procurement Watch chairman Komarudin Hidayat said recently that the lack of transparency in government procurements caused leakage of up to 60 percent in the state budget. "This figure is unbelievable," he said.

Syamsul said the high-profile graft case involving the procurement of ink by the General Elections Commission during the 2004 elections was a good example of a case where the KPK and KPPU could collaborate.

The KPK is currently investigating alleged graft in the sale of two Pertamina oil tankers in 2004. "We're investigating the case, but we can't give you any details as yet," KPK deputy director Amien Sunaryadi told reporters Monday.

In March 2005, the KPPU said Pertamina and three of its business partners were guilty of colluding with Bermuda-based Frontline Shipping Ltd. in the sale of the two tankers.

200 BUMN officials probed over graft

Jakarta Post - February 6, 2006

Apriadi Gunawan, Medan — At least 200 officials at state-owned companies (BUMNs) are being investigated for their alleged involvement in graft and abuse of authority, State Minister for State Enterprises Sugiharto said Saturday.

Sugiharto said several of the officials being questioned had officially been named suspects, but he declined to give their names at this early point in the investigation.

The minister said he would not replace any of the officials until the authorities made a final decision on their legal status.

"In principle, the officials being questioned can be replaced, but I have to abide by the principle of presumption of innocence," Sugiharto said after accompanying Vice President Jusuf Kalla to a meeting with the board of directors of state plantation company PT Perkebunan Nusantara IV in Medan.

The minister acknowledged the investigation had affected the performance of several state-owned companies, because the officials being questioned were hesitant to make any decisions or issue orders during the legal process.

But Sugiharto said he had ordered the boards of directors and commissioners of all state-owned companies to carry on with their work during the investigation.

"There are still many BUMNs that are managed according to the principles of good corporate governance. Compared to the 6,000 officials at the 158 BUMNs, the 200 officials being questioned cannot be considered as representing the state of the BUMNs as a whole," he said.

The minister said he fully supported the steps taken by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to rid state-owned companies of corruption, collusion and nepotism, as stipulated in a 2004 presidential instruction.

"I've taken steps to follow up the presidential instruction, establishing a special team to study and verify reports and signs of KKN (corruption, collusion and nepotism) at BUMNs. If its findings are enough to start the legal process, the team will file a report with the prosecutor's office and an interdepartmental anticorruption team," he said.

The minister said the special team was set up in response to an increase in the number of

complaints of corruption at state-owned companies. The status of the team is likely to be upgraded to that of an inspectorate in the Office of the State Minister for State Enterprises, to help it better monitor the performance of BUMNs.

"The process of establishing the inspectorate has entered the final stage. With this inspectorate, the Office of the State Minister for State Enterprises will have an instrument with the authority and legal power to supervise the management of BUMNs," he said. This decision was taken, he said, to help prevent financial malfeasance at state enterprises, which are increasingly being expected to make significant contributions to the nation's economy.

The 2006 budget estimates the value of dividends paid by BUMNs to the state at about Rp 23 trillion (US\$2.42 billion), a more than 200 percent increase over the Rp 8.9 trillion in the 2005 budget.

Few securities firms report suspicious transactions

Jakarta Post - February 2, 2006

Anissa S. Febrina, Jakarta — Overlapping audits and unclear jurisdiction, not to mention the financial services industry's code of secrecy, are the main reasons for low compliance of securities companies in reporting suspicious transactions, an association says.

Association of Indonesian Securities Companies (APEI) chairwoman Lily Widjaja said in Jakarta on Wednesday that only four of the association's 150 members reported suspicious transactions since rules against money laundering took effect last January.

"Our members are not well informed about matters concerning compliance audit jurisdiction," Lily said after a workshop on enhancing the participation of the capital markets in combating money laundering.

Securities companies, she added, only acknowledged that they came under the jurisdiction of the

Capital Market Supervisory Agency (Bapepam). "Some companies honestly do not know whether it is legal or not to hand over financial information to the Financial Transaction Reports Analysis Center (PPATK)." In order to intensify the campaign against money laundering, the government plans to expand the powers of the watchdog, the PPATK.

It will be given the power to seek reports from non-bank financial institutions, including securities companies. Bapepam has required securities firms to report suspicious transactions since January last year.

"Bapepam and the PPATK need to work more closely together in auditing securities companies and ensuring the upholding of the code of secrecy in respect of every report," Lily said.

In reality, she added, although the confidentiality of such reports was guaranteed by law, there were cases in which sensitive information had been leaked to the public.

This made companies even more reluctant to submit reports on suspicious transactions, she said.

Bapepam legal bureau head Robinson Simbolon explained that in the future there would be much stricter enforcement of the code of secrecy.

He added that his bureau and the PPATK would collaborate in auditing securities firms. "We have signed an MoU with the PPATK to avoid overlapping audits in the future." Bapepam director Darmin Nasution said that strict sanctions would be imposed on companies failing to report suspicious transactions.

Currently, financial services providers face fines of between Rp 250 million (about US\$26,250) and Rp 1 billion for not reporting such transactions.

"The number of reports has increased from only four last year to 18 this month alone," he said, adding that this figure was still far less than hoped for.

Money laundering continues to be a major problem with Indonesia still being monitored by global anti money-laundering watchdog, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), although it was removed

from the list of Non-Cooperative Countries and Territories (NCCT) last February.

The FATF is set to review Indonesia's situation at a plenary session in Cape Town, South Africa, in mid-February to decide whether the country can be removed from the list of countries being monitored.

REGIONAL/COMMUNAL CONFLICTS

Ambon refugees still waiting 7 years on

Jakarta Post - February 3, 2006

M. Azis Tunny, Ambon — Seven years since a bloody Muslim-Christian conflict first erupted in Ambon in January 1999, thousands of victims are still crammed into makeshift shelters for displaced persons.

Presently, 15,788 families are still living in makeshift camps for in Ambon city, waiting to be relocated or sent back to their hometowns.

Long queues of refugees can be seen regularly at local government offices, asking officials whether the building materials or construction aid the state is supposed to provide them are ready.

Head of the Maluku Refugees Coalition, Pieter Pattiwaelapia, told The Jakarta Post recently that the situation in Ambon was probably the longest-running internal refugee problem in the country.

Despite holding yellow cards, which entitle them to receive assistance, the displaced people have been led on a bureaucratic wild-goose chase, and are confused by the many layers of procedures they have to navigate, Pieter said.

The provincial administration earlier declared the refugee problem would be solved by Jan. 31 this year, an extended deadline after it failed to meet its earlier promise to completely bring an end to the problem in December.

But while the provincial and local administrations say they have taken steps to improve the situation, Pieter says little has changed.

Three successive Maluku governors, from M. Saleh Latuconsina, Sinyo Sarundajang to the incumbent, Karel Albert Ralahalu, have not dealt with the matter, he said.

The displaced people are disappointed by the lack of an effective system — with the government neglecting its technical guidelines for the reconstruction of their houses. And an incomplete database means thousands of families are not getting the help they need, he said.

The houses that have been built are not integrated into the proper facilities the government promised in its reconstruction blueprint, which envisioned incorporated schools, health centers and places of worship, Pieter said. As a result, many of the houses have ended up abandoned.

Maluku councillor Abdurrachman blamed the delays on lack of detailed data about the refugees, which he said had frustrated officials' attempts to determine what groups had already received assistance.

Earlier, the deputy speaker of the Maluku provincial council, Jhon Mailoa, also blamed a lack of valid data for the repeated deadline extensions. "We have a special committee to deal with refugees, but we've discovered that its numbers vary from those registered with the administration," he said, without giving details of the numbers.

He also advised the provincial administration not to completely transfer responsibility for the refugees to regency or municipal administrations. "The refugee problem should be addressed by both the provincial and regency/municipal administrations," Jhon said.

Religious violence between Muslims and Christians rocked the city for nearly two years from early 1999 to late 2000. Thousands of people died and thousands more were made homeless.

Police, soldiers 'fanned' Poso sectarian war

Jakarta Post - February 2, 2006

Jakarta — Lawyers, seeking a stay of execution

for three Christian men on death row convicted for their roles in Poso's religious violence five years ago, say they have new evidence pointing to security officers' involvement in the conflict.

Together with relatives of the convicts, the lawyers submitted a list to the National Police headquarters on Wednesday of 16 people they said were key instigators of the Muslim-Christian violence that broke out in May 2000.

The lawyers grouped in the Indonesian Advocacy Service for Justice and Peace said the documents suggested military and police personnel had provided arms to both sides to fan the conflict.

"We have documents indicating that law enforces might be connected to the conflict," said Roy Rening, one of the lawyers. The papers had been submitted to the police, he said.

The three convicts on the death row are Fabianus Tibo, Dominggus Da Silva, and Marinus Riwu. Among the delegates were Tibo's son, Robert Tibo; Marinus' wife Yasinta Goong; and Dominggus' stepfather, Adam Ata.

"We hope a thorough investigation by the police can reveal the real perpetrators who masterminded the killings in the region," Roy said.

Poso is a town equally divided between Christians and Muslims. In 2000 and 2001, the province became the scene of battles between two sectarian groups, leaving about 1,000 people dead.

On July 25 of that year, the police arrested Tibo, Da Silva and Riwu, all Christians. The Poso District Court found them guilty of leading an attack on a Muslim village and sentenced them to death in 2001.

The Supreme Court denied the convicts' an appeal after they requested it in 2001. The President also denied their request for clemency in November last year.

Activists and religious leaders have urged the authorities to conduct a further investigation into the violence and requested a stay of executions for the three men.

Recently, the Humanitarian Team for the Poso

Conflict called for the Attorney General's Office to delay the execution, saying it was possible the three men did not lead the attack.

Roy said the 16 men on the lawyers' list belonged to the militant Christian "Red Group" led by Janis Simangunsong and Paulus Tungkunan.

"(Da Silva and Riwu) were just ordinary people who met Tibo and asked him to go along with them to Poso. Tibo and his friends went to Poso because Janis had informed him that an orphanage in Poso would be attacked," Roy said.

Roy said he had three bundles of testimony documents from residents supporting the convicts' alibi and role in the attack. "With this, we hope that the authorities would delay the execution because there are key witnesses in this case," said Roy.

National Police spokesmen Brig. Gen. Anton Bachrul Alam said that the police would follow up the report with an investigation. "But it will take time because we have to gather evidence before we can name suspects," Anton said. "However, if security personnel are proven to be involved in this case, we will still take action against them."

ENVIRONMENT

Logging provokes nature's wrath: Activists

Jakarta Post - February 1, 2006

Hera Diani, Jakarta — Like goldfish, people seem to have a memory span that is all too short.

This tendency might be forgiven in love — which can not only cause blindness but a faltering memory. But in other matters, like environmental destruction and deforestation, can we afford to make the same mistakes ad nauseum.

Not a year goes by without a "natural" disaster that is in part caused by deforestation. Floods and landslides are common during the rainy season, while fires, especially forest fires, are a hazard of the dry season.

Just a few days into the new year, more than 100 people had died in floods in East Java and West Java, and thousands of others were forced to evacuate to higher ground.

Government officials blamed abnormally high precipitation and other such occurrences, but experts said that despite natural phenomena, it all boiled down to forest crime.

"The precipitation is indeed high, but the level of absorption is low due to deforestation," said Hariadi Kartodihardjo, environmental activist and former deputy of the state minister of the environment, in a discussion Thursday.

The rate of deforestation is rapidly increasing, from 1.7 million hectares per year in the 1990s to a staggering 2.83 million hectares per year at present, placing the country among those with the highest rates of tropical forest loss.

The remaining 120.35 million hectares of forested area in the country are threatened by forest concessionaires, primary forest conversion — land clearing but no reforestation, and rampant illegal logging, with over 50 million cubic meters of timber being stolen and smuggled out of the country every year.

Togu Manurung of Forest Watch Indonesia said the government was a major threat for forest conservation as it had let the problem go on for years, with limited legal action against the perpetrators.

"We know that illegal logging is an organized crime, everybody is aware that it is backed by individuals from the police and military, but it continues to go on. A number of recommendations have been made to the government, but they're not implemented," he told the discussion.

Had the government been able to overcome the problem, he added, the state would not be losing around US\$3 to \$4 billion a year.

Activists and experts are particularly concerned about forested areas of Java, where 80 percent of the total of three million hectares of forest is in critical condition.

With over 60 percent, or around 130 million people, of Indonesia's population living on the island, there is a high risk of human fatalities in deforestation-related natural disasters.

Between 1999 and 2003, at least 26 floods and landslides occurred. More disasters are predicted as the road network in the southern part of the island expands.

"Data shows roads built in Indonesia post-1980s are not aimed at advancing the goods and services industry and increasing export. They only benefit investors. While the environmental and social impacts are high," said political scientist Andrinof Chaniago of the Habibie Center.

Hariadi said that it all boiled down to structural problems in the government, whereby every department and state-owned company was required to generate income.

"It's all about commodities — short-term profit — but there is no sustainability. If we just let the forest be — it already benefits us — but the 'green GDP' (gross domestic product) has never been calculated," he said.

Togu said illegal logging was a crime and the only way to address it from outside Indonesia was to bring in new legislation prohibiting illegally sourced timber and wood products from entering into the markets of the European Union, Japan, North America and other importers.

He said importing countries that ignored forest crime in Indonesia were paving the way for forest destruction.

"But Indonesia has the main responsibility since the crime is happening in its territory. Real commitment and action are necessary to combat illegal logging and log smuggling.

"We are in a crisis, emergency and radical measures need to be taken now, as we are indeed running out of time," he said.

Outrage over plans for palam oil plantation in rain forest

Agence France Presse - February 7, 2006

Jakarta — Activists and economists are outraged at Indonesian plans to cut a swathe through one of the world's largest remaining areas of pristine rain forest to create a massive Chinese-funded palm oil plantation.

The remote stretch of land on Borneo island, home to countless species of rare birds, plants and mammals including the largest remaining wild orangutan population, could be decimated in what critics fear is a ruse to access timber.

The 2,000-kilometre-long, five-kilometre wide (1,242-mile, three-mile) plantation proposed by the economics ministry in mid-2005 would traverse almost the entire border between Indonesia and Malaysia, slicing through three national parks.

"The question is, why there on the border, when Indonesia has such huge abandoned, unproductive palm oil plantations or degraded forest areas across the country," said Togu Manurung, from Forest Watch Indonesia.

Indonesia is already losing rain forest equal to half the size of the Netherlands every year, or some two million hectares (4.9 million acres), conservation group WWF estimates.

Prominent economist Faisal Basri accuses the economics ministry of offering timber in exchange for Chinese investment in infrastructure projects, knowing that it is unlikely the area will actually be farmed once it is cleared.

News of the planned plantation hit headlines weeks after President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono returned from a trip to Beijing last July which saw several pacts inked.

Details of what was agreed on the plantation have not been made public. "I think that the final objective of the project is to exploit logs — yes, giving free timber in exchange for developing infrastructure," Basri told AFP.

The spoils would include valuable ramin timber, exports of which are officially banned by Indonesia. "It's too ridiculous from an environmental point of view, but also from a

technical point of view too," Basri said.

Separate studies by Indonesia's agriculture ministry and WWF have found the region is too mountainous to support effective palm oil farming, which is most productive on flat terrain.

A preliminary ministry study found that only 10 percent was suitable for palm oil, Ahmad Dimyati, director-general for plantations in the agricultural ministry, told AFP. Greenomics, an environmental auditing group, has estimated Indonesia would lose 15 trillion rupiah (1.5 billion dollars) annually for five years after the area is cleared, then 2.7 billion dollars for each of the next five years.

The figures take into account the loss of legally and illegally logged timber, loss of access to forest resources for tribal people located along the border, and the cost of landslides and flooding.

The economics ministry argues that the plantation would bring an estimated eight billion dollars in investment to an impoverished backwater and create as many as half a million jobs.

"The border area has many serious problems, mainly poverty. Compared to other parts of Indonesia, it is behind," deputy coordinating economics minister Bayu Krisnamurti told AFP.

Developing the under-policed border region would also strengthen security and create a government presence, thus reducing the smuggling of illegal logs and other goods into Malaysia, Krisnamurti said.

The deputy minister, who insisted development would take into account people's welfare, national security and environmental concerns, said criticism of the proposal was being evaluated.

Defence Minister Juwono Sudarsono said this week the overstretched military was unable to guard much of Indonesia's vast borders, so economic development of remote regions was part of defence policy.

Environment groups say the clearing of the land would speed up the extinction of the orangutan and

be remembered as one of Indonesia's largest agricultural failures.

"In 2005, when they stated they would like to have the plantation along the border, we were shocked," said the WWF's Fitrian Ardiansyah.

The area is home to 14 out of 23 of Borneo's watersheds, he said, warning that clearing it could damage clean water sources for much of Indonesian Borneo.

At least three new species have been discovered each month in the past decade in the heart of Borneo, WWF says. Development could wipe out hundreds of species and also prevent scientists from researching more undiscovered plant, animal and fish species, it warns.

"Borneo is a hotspot for biodiversity. Along with the Congo, it has an amazing level of biodiversity," said the WWF's Bambang Supriyanto.

Large mammals, such as orangutans and the Borneo pygmy elephant, would be particularly affected because they need vast areas of interconnected forest to survive, he noted.

"Palm oil is the number one enemy of orangutans and all wildlife in Borneo," Birute Galdikas, founder of Camp Leakey, Kalimantan's main orangutan sanctuary, told AFP in 2005 just before the plans were announced.

"Time is running out for the orangutans because the palm oil plantations are spreading. Illegal logging may seem horrific but at least illegal logging leaves some canopy in place. Palm oil plantations leave nothing."

Scientists find 'lost world' in Indonesia

Associated Press - February 7, 2006

Robin McDowell, Jakarta — Soon after scientists landed by helicopter in the mist-shrouded mountains of one of Indonesia's most remote provinces, they stumbled on a primitive egg-laying mammal that simply allowed itself to be picked up and brought to their field camp.

Describing a “Lost World” — apparently never visited by humans — members of the team said Tuesday they also saw large mammals that have been hunted to near-extinction elsewhere and discovered dozens of exotic new species of frogs, butterflies and palms.

“We’ve only scratched the surface,” said Bruce Beehler, a co-leader of the monthlong trip to the Foja Mountains, an area in the eastern province of Papua with roughly 2 million acres of pristine tropical forest.

"There was not a single trail, no sign of civilization, no sign of even local communities ever having been there," he told The Associated Press in a telephone interview from Washington, D.C.

Two headmen from the Kwerba and Papasena tribes, the customary landowners of the mountain range, accompanied the expedition, and "they were as astounded as we were at how isolated it was," Beehler said. "As far as they knew, neither of their clans had ever been to the area."

The December expedition was organized by US-based Conservation International and the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, and funded by the National Geographic Society and several other organizations.

Minutes after the small team of American, Indonesian and Australian scientists were dropped into a boggy lake bed and set up camp near the mountain range’s western summit, they said they encountered a new species of bird — a red-faced and wattled honeyeater. The next day they saw Berlepsch’s Six-wired Bird of Paradise, described by hunters in the 19th century and named for the wires that extend from its head in place of a crest.

They watched in amazement as a male bird performed a courtship dance for a female, shaking the long feathers on his head, and later took the first known photograph of the bird.

The scientists said they discovered 20 frog species — including a microhylid frog less than a half-inch long — four new butterfly species, and at least five new types of palms.

Among their most memorable experiences were their encounters with the Long-beaked Echidna, members of the primitive egg-laying group of mammals called the Monotremes, which twice allowed themselves to be picked up and brought to the scientists' camp for observation. Beehler attributed the lack of fear displayed by the long-snouted spine-covered Echidnas (pronounced eh-KID-na) to the fact that they probably had never come into contact with humans.

But other animals, like the Golden-mantled Tree Kangaroo, an arboreal jungle-dweller previously thought to have been hunted to near-extinction, were much more shy, he said, and quickly disappeared into the dense forest after being spotted.

Though the scientists' findings will have to be published in scientific journals and reviewed by peers before being officially classified as new species, other environmentalists said the discoveries were hardly surprising in a country renowned for its rich biodiversity.

"There are many species that have not been identified" in Indonesia, said Chairul Saleh of the World Wildlife Fund, which has made hundreds of its own discoveries in the sprawling archipelago in the last 10 years.

Papua, the scene of a decades-long separatist rebellion that has killed an estimated 100,000 people, is one of Indonesia's most remote regions geographically and politically, and access by foreigners is tightly restricted.

The scientists said they needed six permits before they could legally visit the mountains located on the western side of New Guinea island.

Stephen Richards of the South Australia Museum in Adelaide said he and other team members got a glimpse of what the island "was like 50,000 years ago, because there's been no hunting, no impact of transport or anything like that." Because of the rich diversity in the forest, the group rarely had time to stray more than a few miles from their base camp.

Beehler, vice president of Conservation International's Melanesia Center for Biodiversity

Conservation, said he hopes to return this year with other scientists.

One of the reasons for the rain forest's isolation, he said, was that only a few hundred people live in the region and game in the mountain's foothills is so abundant they have no reason to venture into the jungle's interior.

There did not appear to be any immediate conservation threat to the area, which has the status of a wildlife sanctuary, he said.

"No logging permits are given to this area, there is no transport system — not a single road," Beehler said. "But clearly, with time, everything is a threat. In the next few decades there will be strong demands, especially if you think of the timber needs of nearby countries like China and Japan. They will be very hungry for logs."

Indonesian says waste from mine tainted fish

New York Times - February 4, 2006

Jane Perlez, Manado — A star government witness in a criminal trial against the American mining giant Newmont told a court on Friday that waste from the company's mine near here was deposited in the sea at too shallow a depth, causing the contamination of fish.

The witness, Masnellyarti Hilman, a deputy environment minister, said elevated levels of arsenic in the fish and the "reduced biodiversity" in the bay near the gold mine demonstrated pollution.

The company vigorously denies the Indonesian government's accusations of pollution and contends that the waste from the mine, near Buyat Bay on the island of Sulawesi, was safely disposed of through a pipe that ran about a half-mile from the shore into the equatorial waters. As soon as Ms. Hilman mentioned pollution, the lead lawyer for the company, Palmer Situmorang, protested to the judge, who ruled that the word should not be used until there was a verdict.

The president of Newmont in Indonesia, Richard B. Ness, who has been charged along with the company, said he rejected Ms. Hilman's argument on the

impact of the mine waste. "That has to be left to outside witnesses," Mr. Ness said.

The trial, a rare case of a major American corporation facing criminal charges in a developing country, pits one of Indonesia's valued foreign investors against the nation's little-tested environmental laws. The government took action in 2004 after villagers near the mine complained of tumors, skin rashes and dizziness, for which they blamed the company.

Newmont, a Denver-based corporation and the world's biggest gold producer, has said the illnesses are common to poor coastal communities, and denies responsibility. Most of the villagers, citing fears for their health, moved to another area in Sulawesi last June.

The deputy minister did not make any connection between the contaminated fish and the people's health. She said only that the villagers ate the fish. Experts have said it would be virtually impossible to prove that the mine caused the illnesses.

The chief environmental issue in the trial involves the disposal of the waste, known as tailings, by a method called submarine tailing disposal, which is essentially banned in the United States. Ms. Hilman testified that Newmont's 1993 operational license for the mine called for the company to place the waste below the thermocline, a layer below which water is colder and has less oxygen.

In 1999, she said, a study by the Environment Ministry and the University of Sam Ratulangi here in Manado found that the thermocline was at a depth of 110 meters, or 120 yards. But the company, she said, released the waste from the pipe at a depth of 82 meters, or 90 yards, where the waters were still warm. At that depth the heavy metals in the tailings — arsenic, for one — were able to enter the food chain, she said.

Newmont has consistently argued that the arsenic remained inert and insoluble in the ocean.

Another issue in the trial is the government's accusation that the company did not have the proper permit to dispose of its waste.

Ms. Hilman, who has a degree from a prominent mining school in the United States, the Colorado School of Mines, and is known among the foreign mining companies in Indonesia for being a stickler on pollution, argued that the company had failed to obtain the right permits for toxic waste.

"You can dump waste if you follow the standards and have the permit," Ms. Hilman said.

The company was granted a temporary six-month permit in July 2000 by the environment minister at the time, Sonny Keraf, who told Newmont in a letter that a permanent permit would depend on the company's completing an environmental risk assessment, Ms. Hilman said.

She told the court that Newmont had completed the risk assessment but that it had been rejected by the Environment Ministry because the methodology was faulty.

ISLAM/RELIGION

Protests spread in major cities over caricature

Jakarta Post - February 7, 2006

Bandung, Semarang, Surabaya — Despite calls for restraint, protests intensified in the country's main cities Monday over the publication in European media of caricatures depicting the Prophet Muhammad.

Protesters in most of the cities decried what they considered the use of freedom of the press to justify insulting Islam.

About 200 protesters from the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) in West Java town of Bandung threatened to conduct searches for Danish nationals in the country if Denmark — where the series of 12 cartoons was first published last September — did not try those responsible.

Protest coordinator Asep Syarifuddin warned that the group would transport Danes to the airport to be repatriated. "We find the Danish government hasn't really apologized due to its support of the right of freedom of speech... it doesn't care that they offended millions of Muslims in the world,"

Asep, who did not name a date for the searches to begin, said in his speech outside the Gedung Sate building, which houses the West Java governor's and legislature offices.

In the East Java capital Surabaya, about 1,000 protesters from the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and the FPI held a noisy demonstration outside the Danish honorary consul's office Monday. They pelted the building with rotten eggs and set the Danish flag on fire.

As they held banners proclaiming "Boycott Danish products" and "Free is free but respect us, please", the protesters were blocked by a barricade of hundreds of police officers.

Four PKS representatives eventually met the secretary of the Danish honorary consul, Linda Irawati, and several staff, to deliver their demand that Copenhagen should be responsible for the publication. They said freedom of the press was not tantamount to freedom to blaspheme.

About 100 protesters from various groups, including FPI and the Association of Islamic Students (HMI), protested at the main post office building in Yogyakarta.

The chairman of the Indonesian Mujahidin Council, Irfan S. Awwas, said the publication was an insult to Islamic beliefs and equated Islam with terrorism.

Protesters also called on media which have published the cartoons to apologize to Muslims and pledge not to repeat the act.

"Making the Prophet the enemy is the same as making an enemy of Muslims. If their (Muslim) demands are ignored, it will trigger widespread anger from Muslims from various countries," Irfan told Antara news service.

The chairman of the country's second largest Muslim group Muhammadiyah, Din Syamsudin, said those responsible in Europe for publishing the cartoons deserved harsh treatment.

"Such an act really insults the feeling of Muslims and undermines the value of respecting other religions," he said after speaking at Sultan Agung

Islamic University in Semarang Monday.

"If they're making excuses, saying it comes under freedom of the press, then in reality, they are actually violating the freedom itself. In this case, the freedom is to perform one's religion and respect other religions. So it's natural if Muslims are upset." He also urged Muslims to be circumspect in their response. "Muslims should develop and prioritize dialog to respond to every matter." Amid the mounting protests, the government assured Danish Ambassador Niels Erik Andersen of his personal safety and of his staff. Andersen, who met with members of FPI after they protested at the embassy last Friday, visited the foreign ministry Monday morning after receiving information of more demonstrations.

Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda said the government could not suppress the freedom of expression of the demonstrators.

"The ambassador expressed his concern over the safety of himself and his staff, but we told him that as a host, we are obliged to protect our foreign diplomats. I hope the assurance put the ambassador at ease," Hassan said in Jakarta.

Muslims rally in four cities over cartoons

Reuters - February 6, 2006

Jakarta — Indonesian Muslims staged noisy but peaceful protests in four cities on Monday demanding Denmark apologize over controversial cartoons that Muslims say insult Islam and the Prophet Mohammad.

About 200 protesters from a leading Islamist party rallied near a building housing the Danish embassy in Jakarta.

The embassy is on the 25th floor and the flag-waving demonstrators from the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) were barred from entering the lobby, where unruly protesters from a hardline group rampaged on Friday.

The protesters shouted slogans condemning the caricatures, which were first published by Danish

daily Jyllands-Posten last year. "Denmark must apologize for disgracing the Prophet," yelled the protesters. One banner read: "Insulting the Prophet = Insulting Islam." There were also small protests by separate groups in three other cities. There was no violence.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on Saturday joined the chorus of condemnation from the world's most populous Muslim nation over the controversial cartoons, which include the Prophet wearing a bomb-like turban.

Outrage has erupted in the Middle East and other countries in the Muslim world after more European newspapers published the cartoons, which were originally published last September. Muslims consider any images of Mohammad to be blasphemous.

A number of European newspapers have said press freedom was more important than the protests and boycotts they have provoked. Many Arab commentators have said that defense rang hollow because, they said, European media protected Judaism and Israel from criticism.

Government told to take action over Ahmadiyah attack

Jakarta Post - February 6, 2006

Jakarta — The government has been called upon to take action against those responsible for Saturday's attack on houses owned by members of the Jamaah Ahmadiyah congregation in West Lombok regency, West Nusa Tenggara.

Former president Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid told the government to arrest the attackers because it should uphold the 1945 Constitution guaranteeing citizens' rights, including freedom of religion.

"The problem is the government is afraid. It doesn't have the courage to uphold the Constitution. How can we be a great (nation) without upholding the Constitution?" he told Antara on the sidelines of a seminar in Jakarta on Sunday.

He added that the government did not educate people on how to face differences, including those

between different faiths.

The country's second largest Muslim organization, Muhammadiyah, condemned the attack and called for the government to take firm legal action against the perpetrators.

"It (the attack) was an un-Islamic act. No religion justifies violence as a means to resolve differences in faiths," Muhammadiyah chairman Din Syamsuddin told The Jakarta Post on Sunday.

On Saturday, a mob attacked and set fire to dozens of houses owned by Ahmadiyah members in Segerongan village, Lingsar district. Hundreds of police officers were deployed to the area to prevent the violence from spreading.

Following the attack, 125 members of Ahmadiyah were taken to a shelter in Transito Majeluk, Mataram. Several of them, according to detik.com, had threatened to seek asylum in Australia and Canada.

Ahmadiyah's advisor, Syamsir Ali, said he "regretted" the incident, which took place in front of police officers. "We live in a country where every criminal should be arrested and put on trial, but none of the attackers here were arrested," he told Antara while visiting Ahmadiyah members in Mataram on Sunday.

He said the incident had been reported to the Human Rights Commission. "Residents living in Transito seem to be neglected as there is no water in the shelter and food is very limited," he said.

A religious figure in Lombok, Hazmi Hamzar, said Sunday the presence of Ahmadiyah would not be tolerated by Muslims because their teachings went against Islam.

"We call on Ahmadiyah to immediately decide whether they want to return to real Islamic teachings, or if they don't, maybe just call Ahmadiyah a religion so it will not disrupt Muslims here," he was quoted by Antara.

The Indonesian Ulema Council has issued an edict declaring the teachings of Ahmadiyah forbidden as they are considered heretical.

Ahmadiyah was set up in Pakistan in the 19th century by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. The organization has been in Indonesia since 1926 and was formally recognized in 1953. It is estimated that there are 200,000 followers of Ahmadiyah in Indonesia.

The controversy hinges on Ahmadiyah's belief that the last prophet was not Muhammad as mainstream Muslims believe, but Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.

Art on trial as obscenity furor heats up

Jakarta Post - February 3, 2006

Abdul Khalik, Jakarta — Leave the judgment on esthetic values of an artwork to the critics, some will say, and let the police gauge the morality of the works. And that is exactly what is happening in a high-profile case from last year.

Police have named a trio of artists, a photographer and influential art curator among the suspects in a case they are building on obscenity and blasphemy from a photo exhibition at the CP Biennale 2005's Urban/Culture, held in October 2005.

City police chief of the general crime unit Sr. Comr. Moh. Jaelani confirmed the naming of the suspects, and said there was a total of six suspects who were scheduled to be summoned Friday.

"We already summoned them as (potential) suspects months ago and from the questioning, we have enough corroborating evidence to name them suspects," Jaelani told The Jakarta Post.

Suspect is often used as a preliminary term to the laying of charges against an individual. He said their names would be revealed on Friday.

However, noted lawyer Todung Mulya Lubis, who will defend three of the suspects, identified five of them: model-actor Anjasmara and model Isabel Yahya, who were the subject of the photos, artist Agus Suwage, photographer Davy Linggar and art critic Jim Supangkat.

"Right now, only Agus, Davy and Isabel have appointed me as their lawyer. We are now trying to contact the other two. We will discuss what steps

we will take first," Todung told the Post.

They were involved in putting on a pictorial called Pinkswing Park, showing Anjasmara, a former teenage model and popular TV star, and Isabel posing nude in a lush, Eden-like setting. Their genitalia was covered with figleaves in the photographs, shown at the Bank Indonesia Museum in Central Jakarta.

Todung, also a prominent human rights activist, blasted the police move as an attack on people's freedom of expression. "This is a very bad example for similar cases in the future. It will negatively impact people's freedom of expression," he said.

Artist Agus said he was surprised the police continued to investigate the case. "It has been months already, and I thought the case was over," he told the Post by telephone from his Yogyakarta home. "But I am ready for whatever the risk is because Davy and me have our reasons why we produced the artwork."

The investigation was prompted by a complaint from the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) that the photos were blasphemous. The group also argued the exhibition could contribute to moral delinquency of youth.

Agus said nothing obscene or pornographic was intended in the works. "It's a depiction of urban people. It's kind of like they have their own heaven in the city, while we know such a depiction is ironic to what we see in real life."

Police are likely to charge the artists under the Criminal Code's Article 156 on blasphemy, which carries a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment, as well as 282 on obscenity — for the public display of a pornographic picture or writing — with a maximum 18-month prison term.

University of Indonesia legal expert Luhut M.P. Pangaribuan said the police should be careful to consider the photographs in the context of part of an art exhibition.

"They should see it as an art event. The police must be very clear in making a conclusion that it was an insult to a certain religion or (showed)

pornographic acts. In what way? Also, the exhibition was held in a special building designated for specific viewers who understand art. So, it was not for just any individuals," he told the Post.

Organizers of the art event — the second of its kind — immediately declared the event was closed only days after it opened. The decision was made when infotainment tabloid and television gossip shows blew up the case by focusing on Anjasmara.

Muslims storm Danish embassy building

Agence France Presse - February 3, 2006

Jakarta — Hardline Indonesian Muslims stormed into an office block housing the Danish embassy protesting cartoons portraying the Prophet Mohammed in Denmark, as others demanded death for the cartoonist.

About 100 members of the Front of the Defenders of Islam (FPI) massed outside the building, chanting: "Let's go jihad! We're ready for jihad!". One of their banners said: "Let's slaughter the Danish ambassador!"

The group, mostly wearing their trademark white uniforms with skullcaps, broke through security to enter the building's lobby, where they smashed lamps and threw eggs, but were quickly ejected by police and their own leaders. Several then pelted the embassy's external coat of arms with eggs.

Maksuni, the leader of the protestors, said ambassador Niels Andersen met with three representatives of the group and promised to issue an apology to the media in Indonesia, the world's largest Islamic country.

"The ambassador has agreed to apologise in the local electronic and print media in one or two days, after they have prepared a draft and they will translate it," he said. "If they don't apologise as they promised we will kick them out of the country, and we will ask the government to withdraw its ambassador from Denmark," he added. The group dispersed peacefully.

Indonesian Vice President Yusuf Kalla told

reporters he had protested to the Danish envoy. "Of course as Muslims we object to it and I have conveyed that message to the Danish ambassador," he said, adding however that the Danish government could not be held responsible for the cartoons because Denmark had a free press.

Danish daily Jyllands-Posten originally published 12 cartoons, some of which depicted the prophet as a terrorist, last September, touching off protests and a boycott of Danish products in most Arab nations.

Denmark's Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, while apologising if Muslims were offended, has refused to apologise for their publication, saying that would constitute meddling in press freedom. A string of newspapers in various European countries have also reprinted the sketches in the name of freedom of expression.

The Islamic Community Forum, an umbrella for several dozen Indonesian religious groups, in a statement called on the Danish government "to apologise to Muslims around the world and sentence to death the creator of the caricatures and anyone who conspires with him". Rachmat Kurnia, leader of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, a Forum member, told a congregation of about 100 Muslims after Friday prayers that there was "a big agenda among enemies of Islam to discredit Islam. We cannot just keep quiet".

Dozens of FPI protesters also massed outside the Indonesian tabloid Rakyat Merdeka, which reportedly published several of the cartoons on its website earlier this week.

In Surabaya, Indonesia's second largest city, a group of about 300 Muslims rallied outside the Danish representative office. They later moved to the US consulate, accusing the Bush administration of a campaign to stigmatise Islam.

Indonesia's foreign ministry spokesman Yuri Thamrin told a press briefing earlier in the day that the publication of the cartoons was "about insensitivity and perhaps it also represents so-called Islamophobia".

He said that "as a democracy, Indonesia is fully aware of the importance of freedom of expression,

but having acknowledged the sanctity of this concept, we also believe that this should not be used to justify slander, defamation to sacred religious symbols".

To Muslims the cartoons are blasphemous as Islam prohibits any images of the prophet.

Muhammadiyah leaning toward more conservative bent

Jakarta Post - February 3, 2006

Hera Diani, Jakarta — It's a matter of interpretation whether the departure of Muslim scholar Dawam Rahardjo from Muhammadiyah was a resignation or dismissal.

Yet in his opinion and that of other Muslim scholars, his exit indicates a growing and unbending conservatism of the country's second largest Muslim organization.

Muhammadiyah chairman Din Syamsuddin said Wednesday Dawam was not fired, but "resigned" of his own accord. "There has never been any discussion about his dismissal, although there were indeed many demands from our members to dismiss him. But we never talked about it," said Din, who resumed the organization's leadership last year from Ahmad Syafii Maarif.

Complaints about Dawam, he said, ranged from poor performance, disrespect of the organization and a dissenting viewpoint. The latter centered on Dawam's open stance toward Ahmadiyah and Lia Aminuddin, the sect's founder and self-proclaimed prophet who was arrested in late December for blasphemy.

According to Din, Dawam was dismissed from his position as the organization's economic supervisor in the previous period of leadership, due to what he termed a lack of responsibility and untrustworthiness.

"And now since he has resigned, we never invite him (to organization events)," said Din, adding that Dawam no longer has the right to refer to himself as a Muhammadiyah figure.

Dawam, meanwhile, denied he resigned or that he

was dismissed from his position as economic supervisor, saying he would request an explanation from the organization.

He believed he was dismissed for refusing to stay silent on religious prejudice. "I must've been dismissed because of my standpoint against violence against religious groups. I can't just sit still watching fellow Muslims prevent Christians from praying," he said, referring to the closure of several churches in different areas of the country.

Dawam said Muhammadiyah, which boasts about 30 million members, was becoming radical, and would not take a position in an interfaith conflict.

Muslim scholar Komaruddin Hidayat said Dawam's departure showed there was order to Muhammadiyah's organizational structure, albeit rigid. On the other hand, he said, the organization was overreacting in a puritanical effort to uphold tradition, with Ahmadiyah and Lia of little consequence as religious nonconformists.

"Lia cannot threaten or ruin Islam. This phenomena repeats itself — we have had similar figures in history, like Syech Siti Djenar, and they were harmless," said the professor of Islamic studies at Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta.

As the second largest Muslim organization, Komaruddin said, Muhammadiyah should be more democratic and respect different opinions. "Just state that Muhammadiyah's stance is such, while Dawam's is different. Open up a dialog. Don't see people like Dawam as defiant because he can be a bridge for dialog between different religions."

The conservative Din is also leader of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), whose edicts in 2005 include the banning of Islamic interpretations based on liberalism, secularism and pluralism. The edicts also stated that Muslims must consider their religion to be the true one religion, and consider other faiths as wrong, as well as stipulating that Ahmadiyah was heretical.

Former Muhammadiyah executive Muhammad Syafi'i Anwar urged Din to take a more intellectual position on issues and protect all members of the

organization. Regardless of the controversy about Dawam, Syafi'i said he regretted the organization's growing conservatism, which he said made moderate members uneasy.

"The Muhammadiyah Young Intellectuals Network often complains about being condemned for being more progressive. I think as a leader, Din should be able to bridge the differences, and protect them instead of being judgmental. Otherwise, this mass organization will deteriorate," said the executive director of the International Center for Islam and Pluralism.

NU, Muhammadiyah against unlawful use of sharia

Jakarta Post - February 3, 2006

Jakarta — The enforcement of Islamic sharia in Indonesia must not violate the country's existing system and prevailing laws and that the state interests must be above those of any group, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah say.

"Indonesian Muslim society has the high interest in defending (state ideology) Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution and the unitary state of Indonesia," the country's two largest Muslim organizations said in a joint statement here Thursday.

The statement was issued during a joint news conference by NU chairman Hasyim Muzadi and Muhammadiyah leader Din Syamsuddin at the NU headquarters in Central Jakarta to observe the Islamic New Year that fell on Tuesday.

"The idea to put religion vis-a-vis the state or vice versa must be abandoned," said the statement signed by Hasyim and Din, calling on Muslims as the country's majority to be at the forefront for maintaining the country and Pancasila as well as the Constitution.

Indonesia, the predominantly Muslim nation, is a secular state, but sharia has been adopted into bylaws in local regions, where students or civil servants, for example, are obliged to wear Islamic headscarves.

NU and Muhammadiyah also urged Muslims to strengthen the solidarity, understanding and

dialogs on different opinions to avoid misunderstanding and disputes among Muslims and followers of other religions.

Muslims are not allowed to use violence and terror because they would only worsen the image of Islam and create Islamo-phobia, they added.

"Jihad should be aimed at catching up in the areas that we are lagging behind, such education, economy and human resources development. Jihad should instead means eradicating illiteracy, poverty and immorality," the joint statement said.

It said the harmony between different religions must be promoted, so that each religion can strengthen the statehood, instead of creating problems. Moral movement should emphasize on legal and moral justice, it said.

The organizations also called for a "more serious and systemic" movement to fight pornography and indecent acts, arguing that they were already proven to have damaged the morality of the nation, particularly young people who have been influenced into embracing "hedonistic lifestyle".

They urged "statesmen, politicians, government officials and all leaders to become role models".

Government told to act on religious violations

Jakarta Post - February 1, 2006

Jakarta — Academics and politicians are alarmed at the government's inaction amid a flood of religion-based regional regulations with the potential to sow conflict.

Although the 2004 law on Regional Autonomy states that local governments do not have the authority to issue religious laws, administrations in Padang, West Sumatra; Cianjur, West Java; Bulukumba, South Sulawesi, and Pamekasan on East Java's Madura island have issued regulations that support the implementation of sharia law.

Indra J. Piliang of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies said Tuesday the 2004 law gave the government the authority to abolish local regulations if they contravened national laws or

the Constitution.

He attributed the government's inaction to wariness about inflaming the issue. "I think the government is trying to be cautious because religion is a sensitive matter." The implementation of sharia in regions could disturb relations between religious groups, especially in encroaching on freedoms of minorities, he warned. Administrations should not control religious matters, because individual beliefs were in the private realm, Indra said.

Former regional autonomy minister Ryaas Rasyid said the central government should be more active in enforcing the law and determining if the regulations were illegal. He termed the use of sharia to oblige women, including non-Muslims, to wear headscarves as inappropriate, and added that such bylaws should be scrapped.

Ryaas, a current member of the House of Representatives' commission for regional autonomy, cautioned that not all regulations implementing Islamic law were in defiance of the law and Constitution.

Closer examination was needed of the substance of regulations implementing sharia principles, he said. "If the local rulings only regulate the banning of gambling and liquor and not implement all Islamic laws, I don't think they defy the law."

House Commission II member Andi Yuliani Paris of the National Mandate Party said local administrations should not draw up regulations that discriminate against any religious or ethnic group. "Regulation that dichotomize religious groups will sharpen the potential for conflict." She said judicial review or a class action suit could be filed against local administrations that violated the law in their issuance of regulations.

With the implementation of sharia, women and non-Muslims would be most likely to suffer, Abdul Moqsith Ghazali of the Liberal Islam Network said. "Why do local administrations think they have the right to punish women for not wearing headscarves?" He said the Koran does not state a punishment for women who do not cover their bodies or heads.

ARMED FORCES/DEFENSE

Ryacudu: There is a global plot to weaken the TNI

Kompas - February 6, 2006

Jakarta — Former Army chief of staff General Ryamizard Ryacudu says there is a global plot to weaken the TNI (Indonesian military). This has been proven by the growing estrangement between the TNI and the people.

Ryacudu made the statement during a seminar titled "Developing Indonesian Civilisation" that was held at Nusantara Bangkit Bersatu on Sunday February 5 in Jakarta. "It can be seen by efforts to equate the TNI with the military of other countries. Whereas, a military in a [particular] country must have a uniqueness in order that it is not easily incapacitated", he said.

The TNI as a people's military is becoming more and more estranged from the people. On the other hand, the TNI does not have adequate weaponry. "The TNI is being ruined and weakened", he said without mentioning which country is trying to ruin the TNI.

The previous government of President Megawati Sukarnoputri submitted Ryacudu's name to the House of Representatives as a candidate for the position of TNI commander to replace General Endriartono Sutarto. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) however rescinded Megawati's nomination and in the end nominated Navy chief of staff Admiral Djoko Suyanto as the new TNI commander.

When asked about Suyanto's nomination, Ryacudu was reluctant to comment. But after being repeatedly pressured to answer he said only that "That's my friend remember. I support [him]. The police are also my friends, the Navy is one wing [of the TNI], [former TNI chief] Wiranto is my friend, SBY as well", he said briefly.

Ryacudu offered a short message: "Make the TNI a military of its own country. Least our military become confused, is this Indonesia's military or not", he said. (sut)

[Translated by James Balowski.]

TNI is being ruined: Ryacudu

Tempo Interactive - February 5, 2006

Pramono, Jakarta — General Ryamizard Ryacudu says that the TNI (Indonesian military) is being ruined and weakened. According to Ryacudu, the military has been estranged from the people while in fact the TNI is a people's military that must unite with the people to build the strength [of the nation].

"Not with sophisticated weaponry, and we don't yet have that (sophisticated weaponry)", he said in a seminar titled "Developing Indonesian Civilisation" in Jakarta on Sunday February 5. Also present at the seminar were former presidents Abdurrahman Wahid and Megawati Sukarnoputri, former Vice President Try Soetrisno and the specialist on legal state structures, Sri Soemantri.

Ryacudu, a high-ranking officer at the TNI's national headquarters who was formerly the Army chief-of-staff admitted to being concerned about the situation in Indonesia. He compared the nation to a four-legged table that is being gnawed at by rats.

He gave as an example the provinces of Aceh and West Papua that could separate from Indonesia, Moreover, Indonesia's present position in the international community is weak. The general who will retire next March also gave the example of the relationship with East Timor.

On Tuesday January 20, the president of East Timor, Xanana Gusmao submitted a report to the United Nations on human rights violations committed by Indonesia between April 25 1974 and October 25 1999. "If they (East Timor) are afraid of us, it's normal. If they are being brave, that is strange".

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Military must have a presence in the regions

Jakarta Post - February 3, 2006

Although he initially seemed a surprising choice for a position dominated by the Army for decades, Air Marshal Djoko Suyanto was confirmed Thursday to head the Indonesian Military (TNI). Below is an excerpt of a conversation Suyanto had with The Jakarta Post's Soeryo Winoto about his plans for the TNI.

Question: What is your main agenda for the TNI?

Answer: National reform and internal reform within the TNI is the base. Internal reforms cover many aspects. TNI members are prohibited from entering into practical politics. In the future, internal reform must be able to put TNI in the right position, as required by the state's administrative system.

It is true that there has been strong demand by the people that TNI get out of politics. But in reality, there is a strong drive within the TNI that has also contributed to the internal reform movement. Remember when the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) scheduled the TNI to leave the House of Representatives (DPR) and the Assembly in 2009. But Pak Tarto (outgoing TNI chief Gen. Endriartono Sutarto) said that in 2004 everything would finish, and the TNI left the MPR and DPR in 2004, five years earlier than scheduled.

The next item on the agenda is promoting human rights. It is the duty of the TNI chief and commanders to promote the values of human rights among TNI soldiers.

How will the TNI implement human rights values?

It is a process. It is impossible for human rights values to be implemented properly by all layers of the TNI — from generals to low-ranking soldiers — just because the chief shouts about it. But the fact that the TNI has sincerely promoted the values of human rights internally is something that deserves appreciation. Human rights are taught at every level of education among TNI members. Every commander has a reference book on human rights.

Military law rules that any use or deployment of military personnel must be based on state policy or on a political decision made by the government, with the approval or knowledge of the House of

Representatives. In this way nobody will dub the TNI a troublemaker. In short, regarding human rights promotion, the law guarantees that there is nothing to worry about with the presence of the TNI.

What about TNI weaponry and the welfare of soldiers?

Let's look at Singapore. It is a small country that has good military forces with adequate weaponry. Thus it protects itself from attack by other countries. Singapore is at the ideal level in this context. While Indonesia is far from ideal. In such a situation, the ability to lobby the government (by the TNI chief) is crucial. How much money can the government set aside for the military budget? With that much money the chief should be able to make use of the forces at a maximum capacity. Let's take the Air Force as an example. Only 40 percent of our Air Force strength is ready in case of emergency.

How about military businesses?

Speaking of military businesses, I would say that Law No. 34/2004 determines this.

In the past there were always claims that the businesses were undertaken for the welfare of military personnel; housing for widows of soldiers killed, insurance and health services for soldiers. Now that everything is based on the law we must carefully separate individual businesses from institutional businesses. In 2004, a joint team was set up to list the businesses run by the TNI. The team members consist of personnel from state companies, the Finance Ministry and the Corruption Eradication Commission, as well as the military. Now the ball is with the verification team, and I believe that the team will be very wise in correcting and selecting the military businesses. I mean that businesses that serve the interests of TNI members and their families must be retained.

The soldiers also need medical services and insurance, and those killed in battle must get insurance and the widows must get housing. We can't get that much money from the state budget, can we?

What about the regional military commands, like Kodim (regency military commands) or Koramil (district military commands)?

Please be careful. The substance of the territorial policy is now much different from that in the past. In Bahasa Indonesia, I prefer using kewilayahan (areal) to the old terminology "territorial", which could be misleading. As I mentioned before, our military strength is far from ideal to defend the archipelago. Therefore, the kewilayahan strategy is very relevant. Military officers in the regions must be more intuitive in detecting signs of security disturbances as early as possible, from outside or from within the regions. And thus they must be capable of taking prompt and relevant action to keep everything under control.

The kewilayahan strategy has nothing to do with the old paradigm of territorial design, where the military was used to back up the government's political maneuvers. Now, military officers in the regions can no longer arrest people at the request of the administration or political groups.

When it comes to security matters, officers in the regions should be able to hear the sound of a falling needle. The point is that military officers in the regions must keep alert and sharpen their intuition for the sake of security, because a trivial thing can become a serious problem if not anticipated and dealt with properly at an early stage.

So, for the sake of security and defense, the presence of the military in regions, based on the kewilayahan strategy and concept, is relevant and acceptable.

Many observers are skeptical about your ability to handle other forces, especially the Army. How do you see this?

There are people who think the TNI chief can be everything and do anything. The TNI chief will never be able to work alone. He has eight staff members and assistants at headquarters. They are the best representatives of all the forces. They have been set up as a harmonious team.

There is the possibility that my knowledge of the

Army or Navy is not that deep compared to theirs, because I am an Air Force man. I will certainly work together with qualified people.

Suyanto vows to reform TNI

Jakarta Post - February 2, 2006

Muninggar Sri Saraswati, Jakarta — Air Marshal Djoko Suyanto said what many wanted to hear Wednesday, vowing during his confirmation hearing to keep the military out of politics and press ahead with internal reform if he becomes Indonesian Military (TNI) commander.

Yet his comment on maintaining the territorial structure of the Army in guarding the nation — which critics say has led to abuses of power and an overreaching influence in the country — are bound to provoke more debate about his commitment to reforming the military.

During his fit-and-proper test hearing before House Commission I on security and defense, Suyanto said the doctrine remained necessary because of the country's vast geographic area and the military's capacity to maintain its unity, detik.com reported.

Suyanto, who heads the Air Force, the smallest of the country's armed forces, asserted that he was not trying to curry favor with the long-powerful Army.

"I consider the territorial command is still relevant based on objective rationale. It's not that I want to win the Army's support," he said in response to legislators' questions.

Under the territorial command, the Army maintains 11 regional military commands, dozens of military resort commands, hundreds of district commands and thousands of military subdistrict commands, as well as many noncommissioned officers stationed at villages nationwide.

Suyanto said the territorial commands were "a means" to reach unspecified goals, but the commands would only be used to support military operations.

In hearings that began at 9 a.m. and were scheduled to end at midnight, Suyanto was serious in his responses as legislators bombarded him with questions, on topic ranging from reform, military weaponry to human rights.

He earlier pledged that he would ensure the military stayed out of politics. "Don't worry, there would never be a violation by bringing the TNI into politics," he said.

He said conditions in the country were conducive to preventing the military from dabbling in politics, including a number of laws on the military and defense, as well as the watchdog role of non-governmental organizations, the House and the public.

Although current laws allow military personnel to contest regional elections once they declare themselves nonactive from service, Suyanto said he disagreed with the exemption.

"You should revise the law, banning military personnel to run for regional elections. Anyway, all of those who ran for regional elections lost," Suyanto said, referring to elections last year.

He said he was still considering if soldiers should vote in the 2009 elections, which has been proposed, saying that it may disrupt "military solidity". "If the negative impacts are bigger than the positive impact, I would prefer to postpone (implementing the right to vote)," Suyanto said, adding that it would depend on the soldiers' "political maturity".

"We will hold discussions later to finalize our view on the President's nominee for the replacement of Gen. Endriartono Sutarto as the TNI chief," Commission I chief Theo Sambuaga said.

A total of 36 legislators asked questions of Suyanto, on topics ranging from reform, weapons to human rights.

Suyanto briefly lost his cool when Effendy Simbolon of the Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), which earlier stated its support of another candidate, demanded he answer a question on choosing between handling separatism or human rights. "Do not force me to deploy our

forces without a political decision," he asserted.

During breaks in the session, most legislators, including Permadi of PDI-P — chatted with him. Most Houses faction leaders have said they will support Suyanto as the new TNI chief.

In her final months as president, Megawati Soekarnoputri, who currently chairs PDI-P, nominated former Army chief Gen. Ryamizard Ryacudu to replace Endriartono Sutarto, who has been in the TNI top post for three and a half years.

Draft regulation bans company payment for troops

Jakarta Post - February 2, 2006

Reports of huge payments by US mining company PT Freeport-MacMoran to Indonesian soldiers in Papua have caused controversy, with critics saying such payments erode the professionalism of soldiers. Defense Minister Juwono Sudarsono spoke with The Jakarta Post's Tiarna Siboro about the government's plan to formulate a legal umbrella that will address this issue.

Question: How will the Defense Ministry respond to the military leadership's request for clearer guidance on troop deployments to guard vital installations?

Answer: The issue is being discussed at the Office of the Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs. Currently, the military deployments to guard vital installations, especially those belonging to joint venture companies, are governed under a 2004 decree issued by the Energy and Natural Resources Ministry. It says the involvement of either military or police personnel depends on the companies themselves.

Now that people are questioning the presence of troops at the compound of PT Freeport, the TNI (Indonesian Military) chief (Gen. Endriartono Sutarto) wants the government to set clearer guidelines for these kinds of security arrangements. The regulation we are drafting will not only concern Freeport, but also other vital installations elsewhere, including in Aceh. Data from the Energy and Natural Resources Ministry

show there are no fewer than 8,000 joint venture companies operating nationwide. This is a big number.

The guidelines will consist of two principles. First, the companies must provide any support voluntarily. Second, the police will take the lead, but military backing is possible.

What is the level of the regulation? Will it be a ministerial decree?

A directive from the coordinating minister for political, legal and security affairs is enough. This means all government officials in charge of political, legal and security affairs will take responsibility for securing vital installations.

People are questioning the transparency of direct payments from companies to military commanders in the field. Will the directive respond to this?

The directive will also address this issue, stressing the point that the companies must provide the support voluntarily in the form of facilities, such as trucks or other vehicles, dorms and health facilities for the security personnel and their families. All the support must be approved by a civilian agency. At the moment, we are considering asking BP Migas (Upstream Oil and Gas Executive Agency) or state oil and gas company Pertamina to manage the financial support. This, of course, would rule out direct payments from the companies to commanders or soldiers.

Will military or police personnel on duty at vital installations receive additional payments?

Of course, the duty is an ordinary deployment (which is funded by the state). Therefore, any additional support voluntarily provided by companies shall not be perceived as a payment. Transparency is a must in the disbursement of any extra funds. Because the security arrangements are made in the interest of the companies, there should be no pressure on the firms to provide the support. And the rules of the game are clear: the companies must provide security guards to cover the area inside the company compound. Outside the compound, security arrangements can be entrusted to either the police or the military, especially in areas where there is insurgent activity.

Does the existing legislation, including the law on the military, fail to provide such guidelines?

We are drafting new guidelines because people, as well as lawmakers, have repeatedly requested a legal umbrella to justify the involvement of troops in guarding companies. They are not aware of the existing legislation, including the law on the military and the Constitution, which requires the involvement of all Indonesian citizens to guard every inch of this country's territory. It is also quite clear that Article 27 of the Constitution stipulates the participation of all citizens in defending the state. Actually, we already have an adequate legal basis, but still, clearer guidelines are needed.

People are concerned about human rights violations in the areas around companies that are guarded by troops.

The problem is that we need tough action against armed disturbances that may threaten the companies' day-to-day activities. But if an incident occurs, people will accuse the troops of perpetrating human rights abuses without blaming the armed groups. As these groups commit violations, the police have a right to take action. We cannot allow demonstrators or separatist groups to perpetrate violence because that is a crime.

Will the directive prevent corruption among state officials, including security authorities?

It totally depends on the three parties involved: the companies, the civilian agency and the security authorities. They play a key role in determining how much money will be spent on support funds for security personnel who guard companies' property. They also decide on when the support should be disbursed and who will be responsible for it. These decisions, of course, should be in line with the guidelines. For the sake of transparency, the public can question these parties about anything relating to the security arrangements.

Airforce chief to head military

Radio Australia - February 1, 2006

The next chief of Indonesia's military faces one of the toughest jobs in the country professionalising the country's armed forces. Air Marshall Djoko Suyanto has been hand picked by President Susilo Bambang Yudhono to continue the task of reforming the notorious services especially the army.

Presenter/Interviewer: Karon Snowdon

Speakers: Indonesian political and military analyst, Bob Lowry.

Snowdon: Chief of the airforce, Air Marshall Djoko Suyanto has, like many of his contemporaries, received training in the United States. He is also one of the few non-army appointments as Commander in Chief of Indonesia's military.

With just a few years before he reaches the mandatory retirement age of 58, he doesn't have long to make his mark. And there's no quick fix to the problems confronting him.

Indonesia's armed forces, known as the TNI stands accused of past blatant human rights abuses — both at home and in East Timor, is still not trusted by many Indonesians, and still exerts significant influence over civilian affairs.

Plus, according to military and political analyst Bob Lowry, Air Marshall Suyanto will lack the money and the authority to do the job many might be expecting.

Lowry: He is a good choice in that he is at least giving an indication that the president actually wants to start the long term process of reforming the military. On the other hand, there is very little that he can actually do without government support and direction and resources.

Snowdon: So you think that Air Marshall Suyanto is the right person to continue the reform that's been started so far and hasn't gone that far actually?

Lowry: No, the reform process has been interrupted by various political problems in previous governments and the priority of the current president is to get the economy going and he has

very little in terms of taxation resources etc to start reforming them the military of the public service generally so it is going to be a slow process.

Snowdon: Is that one of the major problems? Is just having the funding to improve the military and reform it along the way?

Lowry: That's one of the major problems and until he's got that, he can't increase the salaries of either the military or the public service, and then pull them out of the business interests that they're involved in at the moment which distort their public function. But there's only so far he can go until some of the structural issues are actually sorted out and the military command system is reformed, especially the territorial system and the military is pulled out of the business interests, the illegal and legal business interests.

Snowdon: Suyanto replaces the reformist General Endirartono Sutarto who was kept on despite offering his resignation in 2004 to former President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

She appointed a hardliner replacement — a move swiftly rescinded by incoming President Yudhoyono roughly a month later. As a result Megawati's party the PDIP isn't supportive of the new man who has to be approved by the parliament.

Still, he is assured of being confirmed and can expect strong backing from the President with whom he reportedly enjoys playing golf.

One task of the commander in chief's job will be to continue to keep the military politically neutral, as Indonesia builds its democracy.

The President's commitment to reform and the importance of Indonesia to the US in its fight against terrorism, were given as reasons for the US to resume full military ties in November after they were severed in 1999 after the East Timor violence.

Australia followed a month later with the decision to renew joint training exercises with Kopassus — the army's elite commando style unit. Critics say both moves came too soon. And in Bob Lowry's view

Indonesia's President and government still need to demonstrate more political will toward reform.

Lowry: It's the same in most countries. The military commander in chief has the authority to direct the operations of the military. But in terms of policy, in other words deciding what sort of armed forces they want, what they want them to do, what sort of budget allocation should be given to them, that's a government policy decision. And that's been lacking in Indonesia because of resource limitations and also because the Ministry of Defence doesn't have authority over the armed forces to direct reform or changes, or the allocation of resources.

BUSINESS & INVESTMENT

Debt irks lawmakers

Jakarta Post - February 7, 2006

Jakarta — Indonesia's foreign debt has many people seriously worried. Most fear the country may never be able to escape the debt trap it has fallen into, which they say prevents it from using its resources for promoting development and better public welfare.

Among those concerned are 27 members of the House finance commission, who recently formed the House Alliance on Foreign Debt. Introducing a recent study by the International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development and the Institute of Multi-Disciplinary Research, group spokesman Dradjad H. Wibowo said the country was paying more on its current debts than it was receiving in new loans.

Dradjad explained that the amount of debt incurred between 1969 and 2003 stood at \$78.4 billion, with the country having paid \$56.5 billion in debt principle and interest installments during that period, but only receiving \$37.7 billion in new loans. "This means Indonesia's debts should be declining, but in fact our outstanding debt has risen by Rp 745 trillion," he said.

The members of the group say they will now do everything at their disposal as lawmakers to encourage the passage of legislation restricting foreign borrowing, and ensuring better loan and

grant management.

Separately, global credit rating agency Standard and Poor's said in its latest report that sovereign borrowing by Asia-Pacific governments is likely to drop by 2.8 percent to \$1.75 trillion this year due to a continued slowdown in the pace of issuance amid fiscal consolidation.

This will bring total outstanding short-term and long-term sovereign debt to some \$9.4 trillion, an increase of only 5 percent over last year.

Trade figures reveal problems faced by local exporters

Jakarta Post - February 7, 2006

Jakarta — Despite record 2005 export earnings, a closer look at the trade statistics suggests the country's manufacturers are having a tough time competing overseas, particularly against more efficient manufacturers from other countries in the region.

The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) reported last week that the country's export earnings jumped by 19.53 percent from the 2004 figure to a record US\$85.6 billion. But according to a more detailed BPS report obtained by The Jakarta Post on Monday, volume-wise, exports only grew by 10.09 percent last year.

Dantes Simbolon, the head of the BPS export statistics subdirector, explained that soaring global commodity prices had contributed greatly to the at-first-sight impressive performance.

By volume, oil and gas exports were down 8.6 percent, while non-oil and gas exports, including minerals but excluding coal and sand, increased by 13.1 percent, the BPS figures show.

What is worrying is that in the manufacturing sector, exports of textiles and garments, furniture and electronics have dropped in volume terms. These sectors are among the largest contributors to export revenue and job creation. Textile and garment exports, for example, only amounted to 1.03 million tons as of October 2005, while exports of these goods reached 1.63 million

tons the previous year.

The last two months of 2005 would not have added much to the figures as the year-end is always slower for export-oriented businesses.

Left struggling by China's booming textile and garment industry, Indonesian exports of these products failed to achieve the targeted figure of \$7.9 billion, and grew by less than 5 percent last year. The industry has been plagued by overlapping problems of increasing energy costs, smuggling and aging machinery.

The Indonesian Textile Association reported that 77 export-oriented firms had ceased operating because of increasing energy costs and eroding markets due to a slump in competitiveness.

Meanwhile, exports of wood products and furniture dropped to 3.2 million tons last year as compared to 5.3 million tons in 2004. The Indonesian Furniture Producers Association placed the blame for the decline on a lack of raw materials and soaring prices for teak — which is heavily used in the production of furniture destined for export.

Meanwhile, producers of electronic goods complain of the high import duties imposed on components, leading to a lack of price competitiveness on the export market. This led to a decline in electronics exports to 0.5 million tons last year compared to 0.67 million tons in 2004.

Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry vice chairman Rachmat Gobel said the government needed to further lower the import duties on raw materials for the electronics sector in order to restore competitiveness.

Given the myriad of complaints from the private sector, observers say it is clear the government needs to be more alert in responding to changes in the global market if it wants Indonesia to maintain its place among the ranks of the emerging economies.

Inflationary pressures still strong: BI

Jakarta Post - February 4, 2006

Urip Hudiono, Jakarta — Hopes of a breathing space for the economy in the form of easing interest rates may prove to be unfounded, with the central bank saying inflationary pressures continue to remain a problem, despite the rupiah's recent gains.

"Inflationary pressures are still strong, so I think our monetary policy will have to remain tight as well," Bank Indonesian (BI) Governor Burhanuddin Abdullah told reporters on Friday.

The inflationary pressures, Burhanuddin said, included those likely to come from probable increases later this year in electricity prices, minimum wages and civil service salaries, as well as those resulting from the recent surge in the price of rice.

This is despite the fact that the rupiah has risen to as high as Rp 9,200 against the US dollar, which Burhanuddin acknowledged would contribute to lower import-related inflationary pressures.

The rupiah closed slightly higher Friday against the greenback at Rp 9,310, as compared to Thursday's close of Rp 9,345, after reaching an intraday low of Rp 9,350. A stronger rupiah makes imports cheaper for Indonesia's consumption-driven economy, but has the potential to hurt exporters.

Burhanuddin declined, however, to say whether BI was considering hiking its key interest rate pending the central bank's Board of Governors meeting on Feb. 7.

Hopes of lower interest rates rose when the central bank left its BI Rate unchanged at 12.75 percent in January after prices eased by 0.04 percent in December, leaving full-year inflation standing at 17.11 percent.

On-year inflation reached a six-year high of 18.38 percent in October after the government hiked fuel prices for the second time last year, forcing BI to further raise its rate to contain inflation.

High inflation erodes people's purchasing power, while higher interest rates make borrowing for new investments more expensive — both of which lead to lower economic growth.

BI's latest assessment says that Indonesia's economy expanded by between only 4 and 4.5 percent during last year's final quarter, slower than the 5.3 percent expansion seen in the third quarter. Last year's overall growth came in at between 5.3 and 5.6 percent, as compared to 5.13 percent in 2004.

The central bank has said it may gradually begin to lower interest rates by this year's second semester — or even sooner — as inflation slows down and the tight global monetary cycle comes to an end.

The US Federal Reserve, however, raised its benchmark rate this week to 4.5 percent from 4.25 percent earlier. Meanwhile, monthly inflation in Indonesia stood at 1.36 percent in January, the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) reported, due particularly to the recent surge in the price of rice.

The government is expecting full-year inflation to come in at 8 percent in 2006, with BI allowing a 1 percent plus-minus range. This forecast has already factored in possible power price hikes, but only up to a maximum of 30 percent.

High inflation set to persist this year

Jakarta Post - February 2, 2006

Jakarta — Although the latest figures from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) show year-on-year inflation slowing for the second month in a row to 17.03 percent in January, high inflation is set to continue looming large over the economy this year.

Despite the lower figure, monthly inflation still increased by 1.36 percent in January, in contrast to deflation of 0.04 percent in December.

The high inflationary pressure seems likely to persist amid increases in food prices resulting from seasonal floods that are likely to continue in many parts of the country for the rest of this month. This could prompt the central bank to further hike its benchmark interest rate to reduce price pressures.

"January's inflation was mainly driven by a rise

in staple food prices, particularly of rice," BPS director Choiril Maksum said.

"We recorded increases in rice prices of between 2 and 23 percent, contributing up to 0.6 percent to this month's inflation rate." Staple food prices as a whole were the largest contributors to January's inflation, rising by as much as 4.26 percent and contributing 0.94 percent to the inflation rate.

The price of rice rose despite the government importing 110,000 tons to secure stocks and stabilize prices.

Flooding across the country has been threatening the rice harvest, which is likely to further push up rice prices.

Besides staple food prices, consumers also saw a 0.70 percent rise in transportation, communication and financial services costs, which contributed 0.18 percent to January's inflation rate. Another main contributor was processed foodstuffs, whose prices increased by 0.94 percent.

However, the prices of gasoline, kerosene, cooking oil and vegetables and fruits fell.

Apart from headline inflation, the BPS also reported that core inflation, which excludes volatile prices, such as those of food, and regulated prices like utility rates, was up 0.72 percent month-to-month and 9.68 percent year-on-year.

The BPS, in collaboration with Bank Indonesia, has started this year to report core inflation, which the central bank relies on in deciding its macroeconomic policy.

The government has officially targeted full-year inflation of 8 percent in this year's budget.

Year-on-year inflation stood at 18.38 percent in November, the highest level in six years, as costs rose following the October fuel price hikes and as a result of increased food consumption during the Idul Fitri season.

BI has forecast that monthly inflation will remain at 3.19 percent in the first quarter before easing to 2.36 percent in the fourth quarter, ending up

at a year-on-year level of between 7 and 9 percent. The forecast has already factored in possible power rate hikes, although only up to a maximum of 30 percent.

Commenting on the possible electricity hikes, Choiril said that an increase of between 15 and 40 percent could up inflation by between 0.4 and 1 percent.

"If electricity prices rise by 30 percent, then inflation will increase by 0.9 percent," he said. "And this is just the direct effect — we have yet to calculate the knock-on effects." Separately, Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati said that monthly inflation was expected to remain high until March at the earliest. "Afterward, we expect inflation to ease," she said. "We will from then on be particularly cautious about months with holidays and the year-end in order to keep inflation at those times in check at below 1 percent."

Local auto sector braces for lower duties

Jakarta Post - February 1, 2006

Jakarta — As would-be easy riders get revved up over the prospect of cheaper cars and motorcycles in the wake of falling import duties, the local industry sees the lower tariff regime as another threat that must be overcome if it is to survive.

"Lower import duties accompanied by a flood of imported cars will gradually damage our manufacturing sector," the Industry Ministry's director general for the automotive, information and communications industries, Budi Darmadi, said Monday.

A committee from the Finance Ministry charged with revising import duties announced last Friday that it had completed the second phase of its import duty reductions, including those on automotive products.

This year, the duty cuts will apply to completely built-up (CBU) sedans of between 1,500cc and 3,000cc, such as the Vios, Altis and Camry models from Toyota, and the Civic and Accord models from Honda. A number of BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Peugeot

models are also included in this category.

The import duty on these cars has been cut to 60 percent from 70 percent last year. In the period up to 2010, the import duties on CBU cars in all categories will have to be gradually reduced to 40 percent from the current levels of between 45 and 80 percent.

Import duties on CBU motorcycles have also been cut. Compared to between 35 and 60 percent last year, importers this year will have to pay a duty of between 30 and 50 percent on such products.

Industry players have said they are concerned that lower import duties on CBU vehicles, and higher duties on components, will adversely affect domestic manufacturing — leading to higher unemployment in the long run — as it will become more profitable to import rather than manufacture.

Even with the old duties, Chinese-made motorcycles have been flooding the Indonesian market.

Indonesia imported some 75,000 CBU vehicles from other Southeast Asian countries in 2005, and another 15,000 from countries outside the region. Meanwhile, the domestic automotive industry produced 530,000 cars last year, with most of the components being imported.

Indonesia is currently an automotive manufacturing base for a number of Japanese companies. In terms of car output, Indonesia is in a neck-and-neck battle with neighbors Thailand (648,000 units per year) and Malaysia (500,000).

Indonesian Automotive Producers Association (Gaikindo) has estimated that local firms, which employ some 150,000 workers, would this year only be able to produce 500,000 units at the most due to increasing operating costs.

Gaikindo deputy chairman Jongkie Sugiarto said his association would first study the new import duty arrangements before making an assessment. "It is obvious that the automotive industry must increase its competitiveness," Budi said, adding that the problem currently faced by Indonesian manufacturers was the lack of trained and skilled staff.

Automotive manufacturers here are also still highly dependent on imported components as very few local suppliers have been able to maintain reliable supplies of high quality automotive parts.

OPINION & ANALYSIS

In pursuit of a humane Acehese society

Jakarta Post - February 7, 2006

Carla Bianpoen, Contributor, Jakarta — Both the Helsinki Accord and the BRR (Aceh and Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency) are failing to include women, says Samsidar, Nobel Prize candidate, special rapporteur on Violence against Women, and chair of the Aceh Women Volunteers for Humanity (RPuK).

"Women should have been given a major role in the making of the rehabilitation and reconstruction blueprint, but although BRR chief Pak Kuntoro has repeatedly stated women have a key role in making the rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts a success, he has yet to establish concrete strategies to allow women to act upon his word," she says. "Neither has the Helsinki Accord accorded adequate space to women. Women took the brunt during Aceh's long struggle, were harassed, violated and raped, while taking responsibility for the survival of their families when their menfolk left home to fight, or were killed or simply disappeared without trace.

"Setting up shelters and barracks without giving a thought to women's specific concerns may have been inevitable in the first moments of urgency, but today such negligence is giving rise to rampant violence; women in the barracks are left in fear, anguish and inconceivable insecurity." The post-tsunami situation and peace accord should have provided momentum to revitalize old traditions with modern understanding, explains Samsidar.

When internally displaced people (IDPs) from Meunasah Lhok wished to leave their shelters, she and her RPuK Team facilitated the rebuilding of their village based on democratic values rooted in community traditions of mutual respect that were on the verge of extinction.

"Women are a major source to tap if a peaceful, prosperous, and just society is a genuine desire of power holders," says Samsidar.

Her commitment to the establishment of a society where peace and security reign as basic elements of people's well-being does not come out of the blue. One of the early leaders of the Aceh women's movement, her efforts started when she found women were sidelined and marginalized in ways that defied logic. That was some twenty years ago.

Activist and action

Following her activism during her student days at the Department of Agriculture of Syah Kuala University, Banda Aceh, as a researcher into sustainable food crops and plant protection, she blended lecturing at the Agriculture Department of Gajah Putih University in Takengon with consultancy for the PPW/LTA-77 Project for Coffee Smallholders, which included empowerment of women farmers (a joint project between the Indonesian and Dutch governments). She became the founder of the Foundation for Women's Development in Takengon (YPW), which was among the first women's organization in the province.

With a membership of 1,000 women (now reduced to 500), YPW includes a credit union (economic empowerment), and organizes community participation, studies on women in Islam, and provides advocacy for women victims of violence as well as assisting women IDPs. She and her team defied threats to help coffee smallholders retain their human dignity.

A mover and shaker, she was also a founder of the Aceh Transformation and Gender Working group (1986), as well as a founder of Flower Aceh NGO in 1987 which aimed at women's empowerment, heading the board until recently. She was also behind the founding (in 1999) of RPuK, a group she still heads, focusing on assistance and rehabilitation of women and children IDPs, which has earned a unique reputation for credibility in post-tsunami assistance.

In 1998 she became a member of the newly established National Commission on Violence against Women, also serving as adjunct secretary-general.

Since 2005 she has served as the special rapporteur on Violence against Women in Aceh, who seeks out and receives information on violence against women in Aceh, and recommends ways and means of dealing with these issues at local, regional and national levels.

Samsidar was also a major player in the holding of Duek Pakat Inong Aceh (All-Aceh Women's Conference) 2000, bringing together over 500 women who came up with a comprehensive blueprint for establishing peace in their troubled land.

Similarly, she helped hold the second Duek Pakat Inong Aceh in June 2005, the recommendations from which were welcomed warmly by BRR chief, but have yet to be realized.

Known for her firm commitment and belief in women as prime movers of transformation, she is also among the most credible women whose personal integrity makes her among the strong pillars of the women's movement in Aceh.

Family ties

As she travels throughout the province and back-and-forth between Lhokseumawe, Banda Aceh and Jakarta, the 39-year-old Acehnese is a familiar face in the world of activists.

Not many know, however, that her roots were in the aristocracy that ruled Aceh Besar and Pidie. Her father, a policeman by profession, and a member of the DPRD (local legislature), never made use of his rightful title of Teuku Meurah, and neither does Samsidar or any of her kin.

Her mother, a native from Takengon, was a housewife and teacher of koranic verses who was actively involved in antipoligamy activism.

Born in Banda Aceh, Samsidar's nomadic life is nothing new to her. As a child she was on the move all the time, along with her father, who served in the police force with assignments that changed from place to place.

While it is taking its toll on her physical condition, it has given her a chance to widen her horizons, and put an even stronger accent on the virtues of humanity that she got from home.

Asked what would be her personal wish for the future, she says she would dearly love to be allowed the time and means to take transformative studies, which would enable her better to assist communities in her native Aceh that are coping with the change from tradition to modernity.

For now, however, she is too busy investigating and reporting on cases that urgently need the immediate attention of those in influential, decision-making positions.

Labor and Coalition must act for West Papua

Green Left Weekly Editorial - February 1, 2006

The Socialist Alliance calls on the federal Coalition government and the ALP opposition to learn the lesson of East Timor in relation to West Papua.

Alliance spokesperson Pip Hinman said: "Last week's arrival on Cape York of 43 West Papuan asylum seekers and the shooting of a young protester in West Papua should set alarm bells ringing in the ALP. Will the people of West Papua have to endure as bloody and painful a struggle as the East Timorese before Labor drops the pro-Jakarta policy on West Papua it now shares with the Howard government?"

The Socialist Alliance is challenging federal Labor to distinguish itself from the inhumane and racist refugee policy of the Howard government and engage positively with the West Papuan people's struggle for self-determination. But Hinman noted that the signs were unpromising.

"Instead of standing up for the rights of the West Papuans, the federal opposition, through shadow minister for Overseas Aid and Pacific Island Affairs Bob Sercombe, is simply calling for a joint parliamentary fact-finding trip to West Papua by Indonesian and Australian parliamentarians.""But what facts does Labor have to find? The Indonesia army and elite have oppressed the people of West Papua just as much as they did the people of East Timor. If Bob Sercombe really lacks facts he could start by reading Dutch historian Dr Peter Drooglever's 2005 report to the Dutch parliament

on the incorporation of West Papua into Indonesia."

That report found that:

1. The 1969 "Act of Free Choice", in which 1022 West Papuans out of a population of 800,000 were press-ganged into voting for incorporation into Indonesia, was a total sham.
2. Indonesian police and army presence in West Papua has steadily increased since 1969, in direct contradiction to the proposal of former Indonesian foreign minister Adam Malik, who stated that "the army would first have to be withdrawn before Papuan society would be able to develop".
3. West Papua's abundant natural resources have been ruthlessly exploited for the benefit of the military and the Jakarta elite, leaving the West Papuans as one of the poorest communities in the Indonesian archipelago.
4. Over the decades since 1969, "not a day went by... when no one died or no one was seriously mistreated". Casualty figures "running into the tens of thousands have been mentioned".

The Socialist Alliance has joined with all those calling for the 43 West Papuan asylum seekers to be flown to the mainland from Christmas Island, released into the community and granted permanent refugee status.

Hinman explained: "On no account should they be returned to West Papua — it's not difficult to imagine what their fate would be at the hands of an Indonesian military that only a fortnight ago deported eight independence fighters from West Papua to Jakarta against their will."

The Socialist Alliance is committed to building the protest movement in support of the asylum seekers and in solidarity with West Papua's struggle for self-determination. According to the alliance, part of that campaign must be to end all Australian aid to the Indonesian military.

"We support the formation of the largest possible coalition of political, human rights, church and community groups to put pressure on the government to allow the refugees to stay, and on the

government and the ALP to change their bipartisan line of complicity with Jakarta's policies of repression in West Papua", Hinman said. "The Australian solidarity movement with East Timor was critical in forcing Canberra to change its line of collaboration with Jakarta against the rights of the Timorese. We can and must repeat that effort for the people of West Papua."

Socialist Alliance members around the country are involved in the campaign for freedom and protection of the West Papuan asylum seekers. For more information, contact the SA branch in your city.

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