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NEWS & ISSUES

Association condemns attack on journalists

Jakarta Post - June 15, 2006

Jakarta — The Indonesian Journalists Association has condemned a Tuesday attack on a group of journalists by a gang of more than a dozen men in Kutai Kartanegara on Tuesday.

Association chairman Ismed Hasan Putro and secretary general Fikar W. Eda said the incident was a serious threat to press freedom in Indonesia. They demanded the police investigate the attack and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Three journalists in the group were injured when they were attacked by a gang of men when they stopped at the Kukar Bridge landmark on their way from Samarinda to Tenggarong in Kutai Kartanegara. The gang were believed to have followed the group in cars.

The attack came after the journalists attended a press briefing with East Kalimantan Governor Suwarna. During the meeting, a journalist questioned the usefulness of a visit by Kutai Kartanegara regent Syaukani and 116 of his staff to an International Labor Organization meeting in Switzerland from May 23 through June 9.

Soeharto heiress scores an own goal

Sydney Morning Herald - June 14, 2006

Mark Forbes, Jakarta — Attempts to rehabilitate the reputation of the former Indonesian dictator Soeharto and his family have suffered a further blow, with a botched effort by his ambitious daughter to host nationwide World Cup coverage.

The broadcaster SCTV stood Titiek Soeharto down after a storm of protest from soccer fans and claims from Indonesia's Broadcasting Commission her appearance was "politically charged". Debate is still raging over whether Soeharto should be prosecuted for corruption and there are rumours his daughter wants to enter politics.

The row flared as a Jakarta judge ruled the Government had illegally dropped graft charges

against Soeharto last month.

Demonstrators and human rights groups are calling for action against several “foundations” established by the former president, which have siphoned off billions in public money.

Soeharto’s family developed a vast empire of business interests on the back of favouritism during his rule. Titiek is a director of the company that has a controlling interest in SCTV. Her surprise appearance last Friday as the key host of the World Cup broadcasts, believed to be Indonesia’s highest-rating telecasts, came despite a lack of television experience and little knowledge of soccer. Titiek’s wooden performance was roundly criticised.

"Technically speaking, she is not someone who knows a lot about soccer," said a member of the Broadcasting Commission, Ade Armando.

"Politically, she is not known as a clean figure and physically she is not very attractive to lure viewers."

Mr Armando told The Jakarta Post her appearance could be seen as part of a PR campaign by the Soeharto family. Last week, SCTV ran a lengthy feature about Titiek handing out cash to refugees fleeing Mount Merapi’s eruption and last month’s quake, asking people to forgive her ailing father. SCTV admitted it had received “hundreds” of complaints.

Soeharto clan riding the World Cup wave on ‘SCTV’

Jakarta Post - June 12, 2006

M. Taufiqurrahman and Tony Hotland, Jakarta — Soccer fans glued to televisions, anxiously awaiting the opening match between Germany and Costa Rica received an unexpected shock Friday night, when former president Soeharto’s daughter Titiek appeared as the show’s host.

After the tiring television coverage of Soeharto’s illness and a family feud that involved his son Bambang Trihatmodjo, TV viewers now have to cope

with the presence of another member of Soeharto's family sunning themselves in the media spotlight.

The public could be forgiven for thinking the appearance of Titiek was part of a public relations campaign launched by the Soeharto family to mend its tarnished image.

Ade Armando of the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI) said the move was politically charged and could be seen as part of a campaign to win back the hearts of the public in the long run. However, Titiek has done it in a very inelegant way, he said.

"Technically speaking, she is not someone who knows a lot about soccer. Politically, she is not known as clean figure and physically she is not very attractive to lure viewers," Ade told The Jakarta Post.

He said the ill-advised decision would only further damage the image of the Soeharto family. "She has dug her own grave, as people are aware that the supposed come-back of the Soeharto family has not been done in an elegant way," he said.

Ade said his commission would seek clarification from SCTV over its decision to use Titiek as a presenter for the World Cup.

"As a private television station, SCTV makes use of a frequency that belongs to the public. It therefore should not allow it to be used as a vehicle by which politicians can promote their own interests," he told The Jakarta Post.

Titiek is the commissioner of PT Abhitama Mediatama, a subsidiary of telecommunications and IT company Elang Mahkota Teknologi. Abhitama later took a controlling share in SCTV and she became one of its station's commissioners.

The World Cup is just the latest in a string of shows that have been hijacked by powerful businessmen and politicians to polish their images.

SCTV earlier ran a lengthy feature about Titiek handing out Rp 100 million to refugees fleeing Merapi eruption and asking the people to forgive her ailing father.

Private TV stations RCTI also came under fire for broadcasting a show that denied the alleged involvement of its owner Hari Tanoesoedibjo in a financial scandal.

SCTV, RCTI and some other private stations that had committed similar transgressions would be given a warning by the KPI, Ade said. Ade alleged that hard-won press freedoms were being used by powerful individuals to promote their own narrow interests.

SCTV spokesman Uki Pratama defended Titiek's appearance, saying it was meant to be a surprise and aimed to expose the World Cup to a wide range of viewers.

"A wide range of people from political leaders, public figures, government officials and celebrities anxiously waited for this event," he told the Post. "So, we surprised them by presenting those figures as the host, including Titiek Soeharto." Uki said that there would be more surprise guests in future broadcasts. "As for Titiek, she has to improve her skill as a presenter," he said.

Indonesian quake survivors complain of slow aid flow

Agence France Presse - June 10, 2006

Sudimoro — Cramped in a single tent sheltering 41 people, survivors of last month's Indonesian earthquake at this hamlet complain they receive only one meal a day with assistance still slow to fully flow here two weeks after the disaster.

"We don't know how much longer we have to endure this situation," said a weary-looking Endang, sitting with four other shabbily-dressed women in the blue tarpaulin tent emblazoned with the logo of British charity Oxfam.

Sudimoro is one of many hamlets in Bantul district flattened by the May 27 earthquake on Indonesia's Java island, which left more than 5,800 dead and thousands injured.

Men, women and children from 13 families, including the elderly, are confined in this flimsy tent, which gives little protection from the chill of the night.

An elderly woman with a bandage around her arm and chest sat in a corner in silence. She was in her 80s and suffered a broken arm and ribs when her house collapsed in the 6.3-magnitude temblor that rocked Indonesia's densely-populated Central Java and Yogyakarta provinces, a younger woman explained.

The group here receives two kilograms (nearly four and a half pounds) of rice, 20 packs of instant noodles, some sugar and cooking oil every day from the local relief coordinating post.

"With this supply, we eat only one meal a day. If we are hungry later in the day or at night we have to fend for ourselves, but we don't have any money to buy anything," said Sarilah, whose husband died in the earthquake.

"Even for two kilograms of rice, we have to fight. People have become ill-tempered and we often have quarrels because of this. Why? Because we all need to eat," she said.

Surviving men in these families, who normally did odd jobs such as brick-laying or tilling other people's land, have been idle since the quake.

Two of the men had been recruited by a neighboring family to demolish their shaky house that day for a meagre pay of less than one dollar.

Apart from the lack of food aid, the survivors also say they are unhappy living in the crowded tent. "It's cold at night. There should be one tent for one family because we married couples have also biological needs," Sarilah said.

The women are aware that their shortages stem not from a lack of aid but rather difficulties in distribution. "I know that aid supplies are abundant. We are not asking for more than we need, we just want to have enough to eat," Endang said. "If you know anyone who wants to help, just tell them to give the assistance to us directly, not through the Posko," she quipped, referring to the local relief coordinating post.

Charlie Higgins, the United Nations humanitarian coordinator in the quake zone, admitted that what the group had been receiving was "very inadequate" and that some areas had not been well covered by humanitarian assistance.

But he said that the case did not represent an overall picture of the relief operation. "I believe that most people have received more assistance than this. I'm not happy with this. But I anticipate that the situation will improve. It shouldn't be allowed to continue at this level," he told AFP.

He said that a team from the UN's World Food Program would go to the village to look into the complaints.

Local heads 'winning pluralities'

Jakarta Post - June 10, 2006

Ridwan Max Sijabat, Jakarta — Most governors, mayors and regents who have come to power in direct regional elections across the country received less than 50 percent of the popular vote, a recent study says.

The survey released by the People's Voter Education Network (JPPR) said out of a total of 226 local elections taking place from May 2005 to May 2006, 67.70 percent, or 153 regional heads won pluralities.

The JPPR comprises some 30 NGOs, most of which are affiliated to the nation's two largest Muslim organizations, Nadhlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah.

JPPR coordinator Adung A. Rochman said winning less than 50 percent of the vote could create political problems for new regional leaders. "This has been evident in Banyuwangi and Tuban (both in East Java)," he said Friday.

Banyuwangi Regent Ratna Ani Lestari, who won 39 percent of the vote for the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) in an election last June, had faced a concerted campaign to oust her

by the local legislative council where she had little support, Adung said.

Adung said there was something wrong with an election system that made it possible for candidates to win with less than 25 percent of the vote. "There must be changes to the current election system to increase this figure," he said.

Regional elections were also characterized by low voter turnouts, vote buying, voter manipulation and fear-mongering, he said. "Many candidates chose to buy votes or threaten voters, rather than formulate good policies," Adung said.

In Muna and Tasikmalaya, he said, candidates persuaded clerics to issue edicts, promising voters they would go to heaven if they voted the right way. The defeated candidates in Banyuwangi, meanwhile, mobilized their supporters in anti-government rallies, and those in Tuban incited groups to violence against the elected regent, he said.

Commenting on the study, political analyst Daniel Sparingga said many local elections had negative outcomes because of the kinds of people who were elected.

"Local elections ideally elect legitimate leaders to form democratic governments, which provide services to the public and work to improve their welfare. However, those here often become stages for local elites in a cynical struggle for power," he said.

However, another elections expert, Jerome Cheung, the program coordinator for the National Democratic Institute (NDI), said the regional elections were reasonably successful despite some teething problems.

"The direct local elections in general are a good start to promote democracy in the regions and rural areas... and improve public services to locals," he said.

He said voters should not expect candidates to win simple majorities if there were more than two candidates contesting the electoral races.

"Under the law, contestants who receive at least

25 percent of the vote are the legitimate winners and consequently, all those who do not vote for the winners must accept the result and support the administration."

Cheung noted United States President George W. Bush won two consecutive elections with less than 50 percent of the vote. Despite this, his victories were declared valid and most people considered him the legitimate leader of the nation, even if they disagreed with his policies, Cheung said.

Candidates and parties that wanted power for power's sake and had vague or badly defined policies were the main cause of voter apathy and discontent, not the election system, he said.

Group targets foreign influence

Jakarta Post - June 10, 2006

Jakarta — Citing the 1979 Iranian Revolution as a model for change, a group of opposition politicians has launched a national movement to counter what it believes is increasing foreign influence in national politics.

The newly created Indonesian Nationalist Alliance said Friday that Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's administration had capitulated to the will of foreign powers, creating policies that had caused untold suffering to the nation's poor.

"We have seen how disastrous the effects have been of the policy to hike fuel prices. This is the result of adhering to a school of thought that allows market mechanisms to set fuel prices," former chairman of the National Development Planning Board Kwiek Kian Gie said.

Kwiek was accompanied by former Indonesian Military chief Gen. (ret.) Wiranto and Sugeng Sarjadi Syndicate economics analyst Sukardi Rinakit.

Kwiek said the nation's indebtedness to international financial institutions such as the

World Bank put the country's sovereignty at risk. "However, the policy of always looking for foreign loans and aid is maintained just to keep our state budget sound," Kwiek said.

A senior politician from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), Kwiek said the first task of the new organization would be to expose the many bad policy decisions made by the government.

"We will consistently present our views to counter the conventional wisdom preached by the government, and if that helps foment a movement that ends in a revolution, then that is good," Kwiek said.

He said the 1979 Iranian Revolution could be "a model" for the nation. However, the groups' leaders were vague about what policies they would put forward to counter the government's.

"The movement was only declared today. Details about our program will soon follow. Our team of experts is still discussing it," Wiranto said.

Politicians Permadi and Aria Bima — both of the PDI-P — economists Sri Eddy Swasono and Revrisond Baswir and visual artist Hardi have joined the alliance.

Kwiek and Wiranto earlier joined forces with former People's Consultative Assembly chairman Amien Rais and former House of Representatives speaker Akbar Tandjung to oppose the government's decision to grant US energy giant ExxonMobil management of the Cepu oil block.

Officials say antipollution billboards not a pretty sight

Jakarta Post - June 9, 2006

Adianto P. Simamora, Jakarta — Environmentalists say the removal of six billboards, which welcomed visitors to the "city of pollution", comes as a major setback for the Jakarta administration's clean air campaign.

Councillor Mukhayar, who is also deputy chairman of Commission D for environmental affairs, said he felt let down by the city administration.

"It's a real shame... Even without them, everybody knows how polluted Jakarta's air is. So why try to conceal the truth?" Mukhayar, who heads the Jakarta Environment Caucus, told The Jakarta Post on Thursday.

The billboards, designed by the Jakarta Environmental Management Agency (BPLHD) and clean air campaigner Swisscontact, were erected as a reminder to residents to get their vehicles' exhaust emissions tested.

One billboard was set up in each of the city's five municipalities and the sixth in front of the BPLHD office, for World Environment Day on Monday.

However, after just one day, Jakarta Governor Sutiyoso said the billboards were coming down. He provided no explanation, but some officials said the billboards were bad for tourism.

Ari Muhammad of Swisscontact said there was no logic to the notion. He said that residents, including officials, needed to look at the text for what it was. "It's self-criticism for the public... We have to take concrete action to improve the quality of city air, together," he said.

Sutiyoso has himself conceded Jakarta is the world's third-most polluted city, after Mexico and Bangkok, blaming it on unchecked exhaust emissions from vehicles and factories.

While promoting his idea of incorporating Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi, Puncak and Cianjur into Jakarta, Sutiyoso claimed it would help to reduce air pollution. He promised to improve commuter linkages so that people were more willing to leave their cars at home.

Administration data shows that more than 2.5 million private cars, 3.8 million motorcycles and 255,000 public transportation vehicles traverse the city streets each day, and many of them come from areas outside Jakarta.

Jakarta is the first city in the country to have

issued a local ordinance on air pollution control, which requires private cars to undergo emissions tests and public transportation vehicles and official cars to use compressed natural gas.

BPLHD head Kosasih Wirahadikusumah said his office was trying to get a permit from the governor, so that the billboards could be put back. "They won't be gone long," he told the Post.

ACEH

Acehnese women to join politics

Jakarta Post - June 15, 2006

Nani Afrida, Banda Aceh — In response to the lack of involvement of women in the peace and integration process in Aceh, several women's rights activists have formed the Aceh Women's League to accommodate the political aspirations of women in the area.

Apart from activists, the league includes members of Inong Balee, the former Free Aceh Movement (GAM)'s women's wing, and female victims of the long-running conflict. Shadia Marhaban, an Inong Balee representative, said one of the goals of the league was to encourage women to get involved in politics.

Although it is a politically motivated organization, the league is not planning to become a local political party in Aceh. "So far, none of the former members of Inong Balee or women who were victims of the conflict have thought about their fate," said Shadia, the wife of US journalist William Nessen.

She said the league was also intended to help build Aceh women's capacity to the utmost as well as to restore their dignity to what it was before the conflict.

More than 15,000 people, mostly civilians, were killed in the low-level insurgency that lasted for more than three decades. Peace returned to the province following the signing of a peace deal between the government and GAM in Helsinki in August last year.

Under the plan, the league will provide training on practical and political skills to gradually develop the economic empowerment the women will need to be politically active. The league will also set up its network in every regency and city in Aceh, up to the district level, and will register the organization with the authorities to gain legal recognition.

A staff member of the Aceh Monitoring Mission, Leena Avonis, found the league very supportive of the peace process and reintegration program in Aceh. But "Aceh women are still less involved in politics," said Avonis.

A number of female former GAM members hope the league will be able to accommodate their aspirations, which they say have thus far been neglected. A former Inong Balee member from Aceh Besar regency, Rauzah, said she hoped the league could give them more room, especially to educate them on politics.

"We wish to improve our political knowledge and hope that we can learn more with the presence of the league throughout the province, said Rauzah.

Another former Inong Balee member, Rahmi, hoped the league would pay more attention to the fate of women, especially former GAM members. "We are now more aware of politics because of the league. We, especially former Inong Balee members, totally support the league because no one has paid any attention to us so far," said Rahmi.

Women's representation in politics in Asian countries, including Indonesia, is still low. In most Asian countries, the number of women in government and parliament is still less than the 30 percent quota suggested 10 years ago at a UN conference in Beijing.

Political leaders are mostly men, while female candidates are only selected if they have a close connection to the men in power and are usually found in less strategic positions, such as the treasury or as deputies on social welfare issues.

BRA must improve performance and focus

Kompas - June 13, 2006

Jakarta - A number of non-government organisations from the Aceh Working Group (AWG) are urging the Aceh Rehabilitation Agency (BRA) to give greater focus to its task and initial role as mandated in Section 3.2 of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding on the stages of the reintegration process.

This statement was conveyed by Usman Hamid from Indonesian Human Rights Watch during an AWG press conference on Monday June 12. According to Hamid, the BRA has deviated from its main obligations related to the reintegration of former Free Aceh Movement (GAM) members and has instead pursued other issues that are not included in its tasks. Also present at the press conference was Amiruddin from Institute for Public Research and Advocacy (Elsam), Choirul Anam from the AWG and Rafendi Djamin from the Human Rights Working Group (HRWG).

In addition to this, BRA personnel are also being asked to be independent, impartial and work fully within the framework of BRA. Not long ago, GAM declared that it was withdrawing from the BRA as a result of internal problems that have occurred within it. "We are concerned that problems will reemerge because of differences in internal perceptions. There is no longer any transparency in the management of reintegration funds of as much as 800 billion rupiah, who has used it, how much is left and what the responsibilities are", said Hamid.

According to Hamid, the internal problems have been complicated by the existence of a division of the ministry for political, legal and human rights affairs that many people believe has dragged the BRA into the realm of politics so that it has had the impact of hindering its performance.

Hamid added that one of the triggers for these problems was when the BRA stopped focusing on the reintegration process of former GAM members and instead was forced to take an accommodative position towards other elements. As a result, the process became muddled up when other social groups that feel they were victims of human rights violations were asked to present proposals to

receive compensation. As a consequence, as of April 40,000 proposals have been submitted to the BRA and only 700 of these have been declared suitable in administrative terms. (dwa)

[Translated by James Balowski.]

BRA's poor performance threatening peace process

Detik.com - June 12, 2006

Chazizah Gusnita, Jakarta — The Aceh Reintegration Agency (BRA) continues to be criticised with its poor performance considered to be threatening the peace process.

"I feel that it will disrupt the Aceh reintegration process because there is a difference in perceptions that is aggravating the poor performance of the BRA", said Human Rights Working Group (HRWG) coordinator Rafendi Djamin at the BOR Building at the Megaria Cinema Complex on Jl. Pegangsaan Timur No 21 in West Jakarta on Monday June 12.

According to Djamin, the BRA's performance has not been optimal because it has been placed in the situation of becoming part of the political agenda. Whereas the BRA should have been established to implement Point 3.2 of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on reintegration.

The unclear limits of the working systems and authority of the BRA has also become a problem. The allocation of compensation funds for former Free Aceh Movement (GAM) members and the victims of the conflict are considered to overlap with the task of human rights courts.

"The HRWG is urging the government to improve the BRA's performance by making the BRA independent and so it works in accordance with the MoU", explained Djamin.

The HRWG is also asking that BRA's structure and authority be changed for the sake of efficiency and the realisation of the reintegration program.

"Rehabilitation is the government's obligation that must be provided as quickly as possible following disarmament, the withdrawal of troops and amnesty [for GAM members]", he asserted.

Inefficiency within the BRA has created confusion. GAM — which was involved within the BRA — has even withdrawn all of its personnel in order that the Acehese governor can restructure it more easily. (fay)

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Government must acknowledge existence of Aceh militia groups

Detik.com - June 13, 2006

Chazizah Gusnita, Jakarta — Non-government organisations (NGOs) are urging the government to immediately acknowledge the existence of militia groups in Aceh. Without such an acknowledgement, the reintegration process in Aceh will be obstructed.

"Without there being an acknowledgement and a thoroughgoing process [to deal with] the militia, then the reintegration process in Aceh will be further obstructed", said Aceh Working Group (AWG) coordinator Rusdi Marpaung at the office of Indonesian Human Rights Watch (Imparsial) on Jl. Diponegoro in the Central Jakarta district of Menteng on Tuesday June 13.

Marpaung also said that the formation of the militia could not be separated from the involvement of the state. Conversely there has been no acknowledgement from the government, even though the fact is that militia members were recruited from villages, given a license to carry arms and trained by the military.

One such example is the Red-and-White Youth Movement (GPMP) whose activities cover the regencies of Banda Aceh, Greater Aceh and Eastern Aceh. GPMP, which has a membership of 10,000, was established on August 19, 2003 and headed by then Aceh governor Abdullah Puteh and Helfizar Ibrahim.

Similar concerns were also expressed by Human Rights Working Group (HRWG) coordinator Rafendi Djamin who said it was the government itself that trained these militia groups.

The government has also carried out a re-mobilisation and sown confusion within the Aceh Reintegration Agency (BRA) in the name of the Defenders of the Fatherland (Peta). "If indeed this is a militia groups, it is improper for it to become part of the structure of the BRA", explained Djamin.

According to the NGO data, there are at least 21 militia groups in Aceh that were formed by the government. These include the Front for the Struggle Against GAM (FPSG), the Republic of Indonesia Acehese Resistance Front (FPRARI), the Republic of Indonesia Acehese Saviours Front (FPARI), the Defence Militia for the Unitary State of Indonesia (LPNKI) and the People's Movement Against Aceh Separatists (GRASA).

There are also other militia groups such as the People's Fortress Against Separatism (BRAS), the People's Resistance Front for the Defence of Teuku Umar (FPPRTU), the Resistance Movement Against Teuku Peukan GAM Separatists (GPSGTP), the Mass Organisation for the Defence of NKRI, the Red-White Defenders Front (FPMP), the Anti Free Aceh Movement Red-and-White Militia (LMPAGAM) and the Anti Free Aceh Movement Front (FAGAM). (zal)

[Translated by James Balowski.]

GAM resigns from Aceh Reintegration Board

Tempo Interactive - June 12, 2006

Adi Warsidi, Banda Aceh — Yesterday (11/6), the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) resigned from the committee of the Aceh Reintegration Board (BRA), the organization for Aceh reintegration, which was part of the peace agreement in Helsinki.

The reason for this, according to GAM, is that BRA's structure is not effective because it is too large. "Members of Defenders of the Fatherland

(Peta) being in BRA is also a reason for GAM's resignation," said GAM's deputy spokesperson, Munawar Liza Zein, yesterday.

Munawar, who is also BRA's legal and human rights deputy, has acknowledged that GAM has wanted to resign for a long time.

GAM's representative on the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM), Irwandi Yusuf, confirmed that GAM's resignation is in order to reduce the size of BRA.

Irwandi said he hoped that anyone in BRA would no longer act on behalf of a certain group. "Whoever sits in BRA should only act on behalf of the government," he said.

House dismayed by slow Aceh reconstruction

Jakarta Post - June 10, 2006

M. Taufiqurrahman, Jakarta — House of Representatives lawmakers are unhappy with the performance of the Aceh-Nias Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Agency (BRR).

In its single year of existence the BRR had done little to build much-needed infrastructure in Aceh and Nias, House Speaker Agung Laksono said. "We are very disappointed (with the BRR) as we had imagined that brand-new cities would rise from the debris of regions hit by the tsunami. But this has not materialized," Agung said.

Agung said that in the two hardest-hit areas in Banda Aceh, Lampase and Uleuleu, conditions were virtually the same as they were days after the tidal wave struck on Dec 26, 2004. "There is no city planning; everything is in chaos. The results don't match the excessive amounts of foreign aid that has poured in," he said.

Earlier this week during a visit to Aceh, Agung said he was concerned about the poor quality of houses the BRR built for tsunami survivors. Many did not even have toilets, he said.

Responding to Agung's criticism, BRR chief Kuntoro Mangkusubroto said his agency would improve the

quality of more than 41,000 houses scheduled to be built later this year.

The House called on President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Vice President Jusuf Kalla to summon BRR executives to account for their work. The House, meanwhile, plans to summon 11 Cabinet ministers to question them on the reconstruction's progress.

Muhaimin Iskandar, who chairs the House monitoring team for the Aceh and Nias reconstruction, said a meeting with the ministers was scheduled for next week.

He said BRR executives could not argue that the need for consultation with locals had slowed the rebuilding process down because construction decisions had already been made and the Rp 1.52 trillion fund for the projects had been disbursed.

The BRR was established on April 16, 2005, for a four-year period. The agency's stated mission is to restore and strengthen communities in Aceh and Nias by designing and overseeing a coordinated, community-driven reconstruction and development program, implemented according to the highest professional standards.

Winds of peace blow in former GAM stronghold

Jakarta Post - June 9, 2006

Nani Afrida, Takengon (Central Aceh) — "These are the best times I've experienced in my whole life," said Aman Masnah, 70, a resident of Keunawat village, Lut Tawar district in Central Aceh regency.

Aman said since the signing of the peace treaty by Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in August last year, he and the other villagers have experienced a life that is free from fear, suspicion and being on the run.

Aman has lived in the village since he was born. He is used to the sounds of firearms, and has experienced military sweepings, arson attacks, and

even physical abuse, because Keunawat was a major GAM stronghold in Central Aceh.

The village of 500 families is located on the hillside facing the beautiful Laut Tawar Lake. The village is typical of many other villages in Central Aceh.

Two noted GAM figures purportedly come from the village. One of them is Teungku Ilias Abed. The majority of its people supported the separatist movement.

Government security forces had blacklisted the village during the conflict in Aceh, including the Darul Islam Indonesian Islamic Military rebellion in 1959. The village has twice been burned to the ground.

In every raid, security forces would initially secure the village, especially during the conflict between GAM and the government. The Indonesian security forces had set up two security posts since they regarded the village as dangerous.

Aman and other residents acknowledged that they were tired of the violence, especially because many of their family members had either died or been injured in the conflict. Most of the people there had pledged allegiance to GAM. Villagers were often subjected to rough treatment by security personnel.

"We were not even allowed to tend our coffee plantations. Villagers became poorer during the conflict," said Aman.

Villagers have greeted the return of peace warmly. Many of their relatives who had joined GAM have come down from the mountains and returned home after being granted amnesty by the government. The TNI and police have abandoned the two security posts, hence people have more freedom of movement.

People are aware that many things must be restored in Keunawat; not only their coffee farms.

Remarkably, there is only a state Islamic elementary school in the village, without any other school for students continuing to junior high or high school. It is common for children not to attend school at all.

Although the whole village has been victimized by the conflict, many have not been provided with aid by the government.

"They say that we have been registered, but we have not received any assistance so far," said Yuniar, a villager who lost a younger brother in the conflict.

The villagers also hope that they will be given the opportunity to become civil servants with the return of peace.

"Hopefully, residents will be accepted as civil servants. Don't discriminate against us anymore just because we come from Keunawat," said Yuniar smiling.

WEST PAPUA

Indonesian MPs brush off Papuan snub

Australian Associated Press - June 15, 2006

A group of visiting Indonesian MPs say they are not concerned that Papuan refugees recently granted asylum in Australia don't want to meet them.

The 42 refugees had been frightened by a request to meet the Indonesian parliamentary delegation accompanying Indonesia's ambassador to Australia, Hamzah Thayeb, and had refused, their lawyer said on Thursday.

Mr Thayeb returned to Australia last weekend after being recalled to Indonesia in protest against the Australian government's decision to grant protection visas to the refugees.

Delegation head Muhammad Hikam said the MPs were not concerned by the refusal, as a meeting with the refugees was not the focus of their visit. However, he revealed members of the delegation met on Thursday with representatives of the refugees.

"No (it's not a concern) because we are not actually (coming here with) the intention to meet them," Dr Hikam told AAP after a seminar in Melbourne on the state of relations between Australia and Indonesia.

"We welcome (it) if they want to see us, if they want to express their aspirations, something like that. But our intention here is not limited to that case, but to broader aspects. So it's up to them — we don't really have a special agenda."

David Manne, from the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, earlier on Thursday said an intermediary had approached him requesting a meeting between the Indonesian parliamentary delegation and the refugees, who are now living in Melbourne.

Mr Manne said the refugees were frightened by the request and had sent a statement to both Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone saying they did not want to meet the MPs.

"They're shocked and scared by the suggestion of meeting with Indonesian officials," Mr Manne said. "They've just been found recently by Australian immigration officials to have a well-founded fear of being persecuted by Indonesian authorities if returned. They are really wanting to be left alone to live a life in the Australian community in safety and security without approaches from the Indonesian officials."

Dr Hikam earlier on Thursday said it would be impolite of the Papuans to refuse to meet him and his fellow Indon politicians. "Usually, in Indonesia if you got an invitation like that, you cannot explain why (you refuse it)... you reject a good friendship," he told ABC radio.

Treaty to recognise Jakarta control of Papua: Howard

Melbourne Age - June 9, 2006

Brendan Nicholson — A new security treaty with Jakarta will include an assurance that Australia respects Indonesia's integrity — including its ownership of West Papua — says Prime Minister John Howard.

Indonesia has insisted on the inclusion of an assurance that Australia will not seek

independence for the troubled province as a condition to be met, before it signs the security agreement.

Mr Howard said he expected to meet Indonesia's President Yudhoyono soon, though the exact date was still to be worked out.

"Some time in the not too distant future we will meet and talk about a lot of things," Mr Howard said.

"Our relationship with Indonesia is very important. I am perfectly happy in any document that we sign to say that we respect the territorial integrity of Indonesia."

Mr Howard said Australia's relationship with Indonesia was always challenging because the two countries were very different, but he said he had a good personal relationship with President Yudhoyono.

"There's a lot of trust at senior government levels and there's always been a lot of trust maintained at other levels. I hope that we will have a very productive meeting when we do get together, which will probably be later this month."

Mr Howard said the security pact would be one of a number of issues covered. "I noticed something in the newspapers about that this morning based on comments made by the President's security adviser. It is an issue that we need to kick around," Mr Howard said.

"There is no argument about our attitude towards Indonesian sovereignty over Papua. We've never had a view that Papua should separate from Indonesia. The changes that have been made in Papua by the Indonesian Government have provided a lot more democracy, a lot more freedom," he said. "People should bear that in mind when they automatically criticise Indonesia every time something goes wrong."

PORNOGRAPHY & MORALITY

Government waffles on demand to scrap sharia bylaws

Jakarta Post - June 15, 2006

M. Taufiqurrahman, Jakarta — Calls for the central government to scrap sharia-inspired ordinances adopted in many of the nation's regencies and cities have received a cautious response from top officials.

Home Minister Muhammad Ma'ruf said Wednesday he would first let the country's 33 governors decide whether the bylaws contradicted the Constitution or higher laws.

"We have decided governors should be given a greater role in identifying unwieldy bylaws and they should bring them to us for further discussion," Ma'ruf said after a hearing with the House of Representatives Commission II on home affairs.

Ma'ruf promised every bylaw judged unconstitutional or in violation of the five basic principles of the state Pancasila ideology would be revoked.

The 2004 Regional Government Law gives the Home Ministry the authority to scrap any local regulations judged to be in violation of provincial or state laws. The law also gives the ministry the authority to prevent local governments from passing laws it judges problematic.

People who wish to challenge the validity of local ordinances, meanwhile, can take them to the Supreme Court for a judicial review.

On Tuesday, 56 House legislators presented a petition to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono calling on him to nullify the numerous sharia-inspired bylaws passed in the country.

Twenty-two regencies and municipalities in the country have implemented sharia-inspired bylaws following the implementation of regional autonomy.

The bylaws have criminalized conduct prohibited in Islamic teachings — punishing people for adultery, alcohol consumption and gambling, and women for staying out late at night without a male escort.

The call to scrap sharia-inspired bylaws is being

supported by several Muslim intellectuals.

Muslim scholar Muhammad Syafii Ma'arif said the government should not hesitate to revoke religiously motivated ordinances. "The implementation of such regulations will only create divisions in society," Syafii said.

The former Muhammadiyah chairman believed drawing up sharia-inspired laws was futile. "Local governments will have problems putting them into action. And past experiences have shown us that the bureaucracy has no discipline enforcing them," he said.

Separately, Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Widodo Adisucipto said Wednesday the government planned to review all the nation's problematic bylaws. Widodo was quoted by Antara as saying that more than 85 percent of local ordinances were rife with inconsistencies.

"Since the start of the reform era, the quality of most bylaws has got worse," he said during a meeting of the Consultative Group on Indonesia. Widodo said many local ordinances were stifling investment in the country.

Legislators take stand against sharia laws

Jakarta Post - June 14, 2006

M. Taufiqurrahman, Jakarta — Concerned by the creeping Islamization of the country's secular state, 56 national legislators are urging President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to abolish sharia-based bylaws already in place or risk the country's disintegration.

In a petition, which included signatories from Muslim-based political parties, the House members said local administrations' implementation of the bylaws contravened the 1945 Constitution and the five principles enshrined in the Pancasila state ideology.

"The deliberation and implementation of bylaws should have been carried out according to the 1945

Constitution and Pancasila, and within the framework of the Unitary State of Indonesia," one of the signatories, Constant Ponggawa of the Prosperous Peace Party (PDS), said Tuesday during a meeting with the House leadership to express their views.

Constant said that the President should move quickly to nullify the bylaws or the state faced disintegration.

Gayus Lumbuun of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) said the petition was aimed at creating a powerful legislative movement to reverse the drive for Islamization of the country. "We want to create a snowball effect, something that we hope will end up with the establishment of a House working committee to investigate the matter," Gayus told The Jakarta Post.

Signatories met with House Deputy Speaker Soetardjo Soerjogoeritno. Aside from nationalist politicians from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) and the PDS, a number of Muslim politicians, including Nusron Wahid and Helmy Faishal of the National Awakening Party (PKB) and Anwar Sanusi of the United Development Party (PPP), were present during the meeting.

Politicians from nationalist political parties included Trimedya Panjaitan, Permadi and Wayan Koster of the PDI-P, Carol D. Kadang and Jeffrey Massie of the PDS and Joko Purwongemboro of the Golkar Party and Muhammad A.S. Hikam of the PKB.

The petition is the first cross-factional campaign to oppose the passing of Islamist-oriented regulations. Currently, 22 regencies and municipalities have implemented sharia-influenced bylaws.

Some of the bylaws criminalize conduct prohibited under Islamic law, such as adultery, alcoholism and prostitution. Some of the regulations have been criticized for restricting public freedom, especially women's dress.

In the West Sumatra city of Solok and the capital Padang, as well as Banten province, local governments have issued regulations obliging women to wear headscarves in public.

Local administrations in Padang, Indramayu, West Java, and Maros, South Sulawesi, have gone even further in passing bylaws requiring Koran literacy among schoolchildren.

Some local governments cited the granting of special autonomy to Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, a strongly Islamic area, as inspiration for the drawing up of the bylaws.

Earlier Monday, Justice and Human Rights Minister Hamid Awaluddin told House Commission III on legal affairs that his ministry, in collaboration with the Home Affairs Ministry, would take action against religion-inspired bylaws.

Porn bill should be dropped: Alliance

Jakarta Post - June 13, 2006

Jakarta — The House of Representatives should drop its deliberations of the controversial pornography bill because it is dividing the country, says a coalition of activists against the legislation.

Alliance for Unity and Diversity coordinator Ratna Sarumpaet said the bill was unnecessary because existing laws already regulated the sale of pornographic materials to the public.

"We have spoken to legislators but they have insisted on the importance of the bill," Ratna said during a meeting with Constitutional Court chief Jimly Asshiddiqie.

The bill, supported by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), has triggered nationwide protests from moderate Muslim groups, religious minorities and women's activists, and demonstrations of support from conservative Muslims.

The alliance was established in March to oppose the bill. On Monday, it said it was dissatisfied with the House's decision to continue deliberating the bill after making some changes to the legislation.

Jimly said the Constitutional Court had no

authority to force the House to drop the legislation. However, he asked legislators to carefully consider the critics of the bill and its effect on the freedom to worship guaranteed by the Constitution.

"Lawmakers should take heed of the views of minority groups here, because a decision by the majority is not always the right one," he said. The court would move legally against the bill if there was evidence it could infringe on people's constitutional rights, he said.

Ratna said the alliance was planning to meet President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to express its concerns about the bill. She said she had received many threatening text messages on her cellphone after joining a major rally to oppose the legislation.

The alliance also criticized the government for failing to take decisive action against hard-line Muslim groups, which have attacked churches and minority Islamic sects in the name of religion.

It said public resentment was growing against groups like the Islam Defenders Front (FPI), whose members had forced former president Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid to leave the podium at an interfaith forum in Purwakarta, West Java. Gus Dur opposes the pornography bill.

The leader of Jakarta group the Betawi Brotherhood Forum (FBR), Fadloli El Muhir, was reported to police last month for allegedly defaming women activists who took part in a street protest against the bill.

Government seeks legal clout to disband violent groups

Jakarta Post - June 10, 2006

Ridwan Max Sijabat and Rendi Akhmad Witular, Jakarta — The government and legislators have agreed to revise the 1985 law on the freedom to organize to allow the disbanding of hard-line organizations deemed to have disrupted security

and public order, the home minister said Friday.

"We will insert a new article into the law to empower the government to take supervisory actions, including the dissolving of organizations disturbing security and order," M. Ma'ruf said.

In its present form, the law does not allow the government to disband mass groups or non-governmental organizations involved in violence.

The move comes as the government is facing mounting pressure from moderate Muslim leaders and activists to take stern actions against hard-line groups accused of using violence in furthering their aims.

Ma'ruf said the Islam Defenders Front (FPI), the Betawi Brotherhood Forum (FBR) and Hizbut Tahrir were among the groups under government scrutiny.

"However, we will first deploy a persuasive approach. If it is ineffective, the government will take repressive actions against them." Asked if the move would contravene the Constitution that guarantees the freedom of association, Ma'ruf said people had the right to organize and express their opinions but were prohibited from using their organizations to attack others in the name of religion or to disrupt security.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who led a coordination meeting on security Thursday, said the government would take firm action against violent organizations. Vice President Jusuf Kalla reiterated Friday the government's pledge to get tough on hard-line groups.

"Any radicalism that leads to an act of destruction will be sternly punished and prevented because they are trying, or will try, to break the law. But we cannot act sternly against their radical ideas," he said. "These groups can think radically, which is their right. We are not going to prevent that. We will act when they are violating the law or trying to hurt others."

Jakarta Post - June 9, 2006

Jakarta — The second edition of Indonesian Playboy, which hit the streets Wednesday, is not opposed by the nation's Press Council but hard-line Islamic groups are threatening street demonstrations until the magazine is shut down for good.

The council said Playboy had broken no laws and should not be banned. However, the militant and often-lawless vigilante group, the Islam Defender Front (FPI), said the adult magazine threatened the moral fiber of the nation.

The second edition of the magazine bearing the trademark bunny logo hit the nation's streets almost two months after the first infuriated conservative Muslims, who attacked the magazine's offices in Jakarta and forced it to relocate to the predominantly Hindu Bali.

The Press Council's Sabam Leo Batubara told The Jakarta Post that the second edition of Playboy had met all requirements for a legal publication. "The magazine had not violated the press law, and no one should prohibit it," he said.

Sabam said the magazine featured only "soft pornography" and it should be tolerated as adult media the like other raunchy titles already on sale in the country. "Soft porn is allowed as long as it is not sold to children. Soft porn and sex education is OK for adults," Sabam said.

After the publication of the first edition, the Press Council criticized Playboy for selling copies in the street.

FPI leader Habib Riziq Shihab said that by continuing to publish, Playboy had "challenged" the Muslim majority and said Muslim activists would "take the challenge." "We will take to the streets soon to protest the publication," he told the Antara news wire.

Riziq said he believed the news about Playboy moving its offices to Bali was only a ploy to fool its critics. He promised to visit the magazines former headquarters in Fatmawati, South Jakarta, to check whether it remained a distribution center.

Other hard-line groups, including the Indonesian Mujahidin Council, the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia and Betawi Brotherhood Forum also plan to take to the streets in the coming days.

Several members of the House of Representatives said they regretted the reappearance of Playboy because it would provoke public violence.

A National Mandate Party legislator Djoko Susilo told detik.com the publisher should have delayed the second edition until the heat surrounding the controversy had dissipated.

Ida Fauziah, of the Nation Awakening Party, meanwhile, feared another round of attack on the magazine and its sellers unless it changed its distribution policy.

Erwin Arnada, the publisher and chief editor of Playboy, said that starting from the third edition, the magazine would be distributed only to exclusive bookstores in the country's big cities, targeting 25- to 45-year-old readers.

"We will not allow it to be sold on the streets and we will put a 'for adults only' label on its cover," he said.

HUMAN RIGHTS/LAW

Indonesia and involuntary disappearance

Jakarta Post - June 10, 2006

Veronica Kusuma, Jakarta — The United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva is scheduled to begin its session on June 19. This session will mark an important step in the human rights struggle around the world.

Last March, many were dismayed when the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), which is now part of the Council, suspended its session several times. These delays led to the deferment of any urgent action on human rights issues, including the formal adoption of the draft International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance.

The Convention fills a huge gap in international

law: the absence at the universal level of a treaty addressing gross human rights violations and the international crime that is enforced disappearance.

The enforced disappearance of people is one of the most heinous human rights violations. The victim, deprived of all rights and thus placed outside the protection of the law, is reduced to a situation of total vulnerability at the hands of the perpetrators. The Commission's intersessional Working Group spent several years drafting this text. The Working Group adopted it by consensus on Sept. 23, 2005, thanks to the constructive spirit of all delegations. The Draft Convention is now ready for adoption.

Since 1980, when the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances was established as the first ever independent inquiry mechanism of the Commission on Human Rights, the Commission has made tireless efforts to fight this terrible practice.

In 1992, the Commission adopted the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. In 2006, as this work is nearing its end, it would be senseless for the Council not to confirm its commitment against enforced disappearance by adopting the Draft International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Postponing the adoption of such an important text would be an act of betrayal toward the families of victims that have been working for its adoption for many years. Procedural matters should not be allowed to trump protection for the families of victims.

The Human Rights Council is the replacement for the 60-year old UNCHR. The UNCHR has long been criticized for seating gross human rights violators, enabling them to protect themselves and their allies from scrutiny and punishment for their own human right abuses.

Together with 46 countries from every continent, Indonesia is one of the important members of this council. Ironically, Indonesia has a bad record on dealing with involuntary disappearance issues.

Besides the greatest tragedy, the crackdown on alleged communists in 1965, Indonesia is still coping with involuntary disappearance cases from the 1984 Tanjung Priok incident, the 1989 Talang Sari incident, the turbulent period of 1997-98, and the unrest in Aceh and Papua. The 1997 and 1998 cases involving kidnappings of pro-democratic activists are now in the hands of the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM), but the commission appears powerless in the face of rejection and resistance by the suspected perpetrators of disappearances, especially TNI (the Indonesian Military).

The United Nations Working Group on Enforced Disappearances has noted that Asia holds the largest number of involuntary disappearances on record. Indonesia itself has at least 1,266 cases between 1965 and 2002, mostly in areas like Aceh and Papua where the military clashed with rebellious factions. The greatest number of disappearances allegedly happened between 1998 and 2000.

In Asia, only Japan and Sri Lanka supported the drafting of the International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance. Big countries like China and India have refused to support it. Indonesia has abstained.

Consequently, many organizations have lobbied to push all member states of the Human Rights Council to give the highest priority to approving the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance this month, during the first session of the Human Rights Council. Then it can be forwarded to the General Assembly for adoption.

The Indonesian government should contribute to this process. This will demonstrate not only its determination to promote and protect human rights, but also its transformation into a truly democratic society.

[The writer is Indonesia Country Coordinator for AFAD (Asia Federation Against Involuntary Disappearance) and can be reached at pravdavero@gmail.com.]

POLITICS/POLITICAL PARTIES

House, Army end row over communist fray

Jakarta Post - June 14, 2006

M. Taufiqurrahman, Jakarta — The Jakarta Military Commander's recent remark that the House of Representatives has been infiltrated by sympathizers of the outlawed Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was not politically motivated, Army Chief Gen. Djoko Santoso says.

Djoko told the House Commission I on foreign affairs and defense Tuesday that as servants of the state, senior Army officers were forbidden from commenting on political matters.

"The Indonesian Military already has a procedure that bars its members from making such statements, especially those regarding politics," Djoko told members of the commission.

During a TNI seminar last week, Lt. Gen. Agustadi Sasongko alleged more than 100 of House members were connected to the PKI. The TNI leadership quickly responded to Agustadi's statement, saying he was not speaking for the military.

Commission I chairman Theo L. Sambuaga, of the Golkar Party, said the latest statement from Djoko should bring an end to the controversy.

"I have meet with (Agustadi) and he said he was not accusing House members of being PKI members. He said he was only making a 'scientific proposition' that the communist movement is still alive," Theo said.

Theo said political analyst Alfian Tanjung of Hamka University first made a link between current House members and communism. Alfian also heads Pancasila Youth, a nationalist movement closely linked to the New Order regime and known for its anti-communist stance.

Commission I deputy chairman Amris Hassan of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) said legislators should not overreact to the statement. "The (TNI-)communism issue is not substantial. What is more important is how political parties were infiltrated," he said.

However, not all House members agreed. Lawmaker Effendi Choirie of the National Awakening Party (PKB) said Agustadi should be censored for the comment because the military had no place in politics in the reform era. "The TNI Law clearly describes the military as a mere instrument of the state," Effendi said.

Agustadi is not the only senior official concerned with communist infiltration. State Intelligence Agency chief Syamsir Siregar recently said his agents had uncovered mounting evidence of increased communist activities in the country.

Megawati defends party against critics

Jakarta Post - June 12, 2006

Makassar — Former president Megawati Soekarnoputri challenged critics Saturday to prove accusations that the political party she leads, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), had been infiltrated by communists.

"If it's true the PDI-P has been infiltrated by communists, then it is the security authorities who should be blamed for negligence," she said while addressing a meeting of party members.

Megawati said that until some solid evidence was presented, she would ignore the allegations and instead concentrate on winning the 2009 general election.

Political foes of the PDI-P, the second largest party after Golkar, have made much of the presence in its leadership of Ribka Tjiptaning, the daughter of a banned Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) activist, and Budiman Sujatmiko, a former member of the People's Democratic Party, which was banned by the Soeharto regime in 1997 on suspicion of being a "reincarnation" of the PKI.

CORRUPTION/COLLUSION/NEPOTISM

Replacement of antigraft court judges unfair: Todung

Jakarta Post - June 15, 2006

Jakarta — A decision to replace three Anticorruption Court judges after they ruled Supreme Court Chief Justice Bagir Manan should testify in a graft trial is unfair and irregular, a lawyer and antigraft activist says.

Three non-career judges, Akhmad Linoh, Dudu Duswara and I Made Hendra Kusuma, have boycotted the graft trial of lawyer Harini Wijoso since May 3.

That day, presiding judge Kresna Menon overruled a 3-2 vote by the panel of judges that Bagir be made to testify as a witness in a trial, which implicates him and other court officials. The three judges walked out after Kresna ignored Anticorruption Court rules, which bound him to accept the majority decision.

Harini's trial has stalled since, with the three judges refusing to attend five more scheduled hearings.

A spokeswoman for the Central Jakarta District Court, where the Anticorruption Court is based, said the three judges would be replaced by new non-career judges, Slamet Subagyo, Sofialdi and Ugo, who were appointed by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on June 10.

Transparency International Indonesia head and lawyer Todung Mulya Lubis said the decision showed the influence the Supreme Court wielded in the justice system.

"I cannot understand the logic behind this. If (the court) wants to be fair, all five judges who failed to reach an agreement should be replaced," Lubis told The Jakarta Post on Tuesday.

Court monitoring body the Judicial Commission recently recommended the district court suspend Kresna for a year because he ignored the majority decision of the panel. However, that recommendation has not been acted on.

Harini stands accused of attempting to bribe Bagir in 2003 to favor her client, business tycoon Probosutedjo. She had earlier filed an appeal to the Supreme Court against Probosutedjo's four-year conviction for a Rp 100.9 billion (about US\$11,000) graft case. Probosutedjo made bribery

allegations against Bagir and other Supreme Court officials after the court rejected his appeal.

Todung said whoever replaced the three judges would face the same dilemma — they had to decide whether requiring Bagir to testify was necessary. "If the new judges also disagree with the presiding judge (Kresna), will these judges have to be replaced again?" he said. People would start asking what was wrong with the justice system, Todung said.

He said the trial documents stated clearly that Bagir was on the lists of witnesses that could be called to testify. Prosecutors in the trial have accused Harini of asking Probosutedjo for Rp 5 billion to bribe Bagir in 2003.

District court spokesman Ridwan Mansyur said the Criminal Code allowed the court to replace judges if they failed to appear in court. "We were more worried about the case being dropped," said Ridwan. He said Kresna would decide on a new trial schedule for Harini within a week.

Legal activist Hendaradi said that the real problem lay within the Supreme Court. "The Supreme Court chief justice (Bagir) holds too much authority. He recently re-elected himself as court chief and (has power because he) can extend judges' retirement ages," he said.

Court orders reopening of Soeharto graft case

Jakarta Post - June 13, 2006

Jakarta — The South Jakarta District Court ruled Monday that a decision to drop graft charges against former president Soeharto was invalid, and ordered the case reopened.

"I hereby declare that the decision of the Attorney General's Office in stopping the prosecution of the case against Haji Muhammad Soeharto on May 11 is illegitimate," Judge Andi Samsan Nganro decreed.

The decision was cheered by members of three NGOs

— the Association of Advocate and Indonesian Human Rights (APHI), the Society Movement for Soeharto Prosecution (GEMAS) and the 1998 Activists — who filed suit over the AGO's decision.

"The AGO's decision did not comply with the standard procedures in stopping the prosecution of a case, as mentioned in Article 140, point 2 of the Criminal Court Procedures. It means that the prosecution of Soeharto's case should be reopened and carried out," Andi said in explaining the court's decision.

It also found that desisting from further prosecution contravened a February 2002 Supreme Court order that the AGO ensure Soeharto receive all necessary medical treatment so he would be fit to be brought to trial.

Andi also said that the Attorney General's Office had to be careful in interpreting all regulations on ceasing prosecution.

According to the procedures, a case may be dropped if the suspect dies or there is a demand for the measure because it will be beneficial to the public.

On May 12, Attorney General Abdul Rahman Saleh cited the former reason in announcing the dropping of charges, a decision made the previous day, and said Soeharto's health condition was considered not dissimilar to that of a grave state. At the time, Soeharto had been hospitalized for a month due to internal bleeding; he was released at the end of the month.

The AGO's counsel, Marwan Effendi, said the defense team was considering its next course of action, including lodging an appeal.

"The AGO and the court have different interpretations on legality of ending Soeharto's case prosecution." Marwan argued the AGO had considered several alternatives for resolving the prolonged legal case, including requesting an in-absentia trial, but it was rejected by the Supreme Court.

Chief attorney for the NGOs' legal team, Johnson Pandjaitan, said the court decision increased the

possibility of the octogenarian being tried in absentia. "Soeharto is only one of the dozens of people that could be brought to trial in relation to corruption cases in his foundations," Johnson said.

Soeharto allegedly misappropriated at least US\$419 million plus another Rp 1.3 trillion of state money through the foundations.

Johnson did not believe the decision would be struck down if it went to appeal. "The new Supreme Court Law states that the judge's decree in this trial is inkraach, or final," he said.

Money-laundering crackdown falters

Jakarta Post - June 13, 2006

Rendi Akhmad Witular, Jakarta — Despite the declared wide-ranging crackdown on corruption, Indonesia remains a haven for money launderers lured by rampant opportunities.

Weak law enforcement, a notoriously slack bureaucracy and the recent slowdown in the drive against money laundering have contributed to a rise in the number of suspicious financial transactions.

Although several key financial institutions are required to report any suspicious transactions to the money laundering watchdog, several of them are afraid to do so in cases involving influential figures. It may seem to some that the long arm of the law only touches those without connections to politicians or high-ranking military and police officers.

The Jakarta Post's Rendi Akhmad Witular delves into the progress made curbing money laundering in the special report on this page.

Now that Indonesia has gotten off the list of countries deemed uncooperative in the global fight against money laundering, the government's efforts to stamp out the crime seem to have run out of steam.

Recent figures suggest the country is once again becoming a haven for criminals who want to make large sums of ill-gotten cash appear legitimate.

"As pressure from the international community decreases, the government seems to lose that encouragement to step up efforts to prevent money laundering in our financial system," said Yunus Husein, chairman of the Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center (PPATK), Indonesia's money laundering watchdog.

According to PPATK, there was a 95 percent jump in the average number of dubious financial transactions reported to the agency from January through April, compared to last year.

During that period, the watchdog received an average of 335 reports per month, compared to 171 reports last year. It has already received 1,006 reports in the first four months of the year, compared to 2,055 received during all of last year.

Yunus said that the increase in the number of suspicious financial transactions could be attributed both to an increase in money laundering activities and to an improved rate of reporting by some financial institutions.

Although banks, insurance firms, pension funds, financing firms, investment managers, and currency traders are required to report any suspicious transaction to the agency, some are afraid to do so in cases involving influential figures.

"We actually want to cooperate with the PPATK. But there is no guarantee that our operations will not be disturbed by certain parties if we report cases involving figures who have political connections," said a banker who requested anonymity.

The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the Justice and Human Rights Ministry is dragging its feet in amending the existing anti-money laundering law. The changes were requested by the international community when it dropped Indonesia from the money laundering blacklist.

After four years of pleading by the government, the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global money laundering watchdog,

removed Indonesia from its list of Non-Cooperative Countries and Territories (NCCT) in February 2005.

The watchdog, which was established by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, will continue to monitor the country on a yearly basis to see whether it is following up on several recommendations, including the revision of the money laundering law.

The ministry is supposed to initiate the revision of the law before it is submitted to the House of Representatives for deliberation this year and implementation next year.

"There are so many laws that I have to manage. I cannot recall the progress of the revision (of the money laundering law)," Justice and Human Rights Minister Hamid Awaluddin said.

"I don't think it is necessary to speed up the revision process since there are other laws which are more urgent," Hamid added.

The focus of the planned revision will be on enlarging the role of the PPATK, including giving it the authority to freeze assets. Other provisions would allow more institutions to conduct money laundering investigations, and expand the list of companies required to report to the PPATK.

The National Police are currently the only body authorized to investigate money laundering cases based on evidence from the PPATK. However, their performance has been disappointing, with some of their officials being indicted by the PPATK for alleged involvement in high profile money laundering crimes.

"We are proposing that the government enable the Attorney General's Office and civil servant investigators to pursue money laundering cases as well, in order to limit the monopoly of the police," said Yunus.

The PPATK would also add several kinds of businesses to its list of institutions required to report suspicious financial transactions linked to money laundering and corruption.

Included in the new list would be property

companies, automotive dealers, jewelry sellers and legal and accounting firms.

Yunus is concerned that if Indonesia fails to improve its anti-money laundering efforts immediately, it could find itself back on the list of countries categorized as havens for money launderers.

Being put back on the blacklist could result in serious economic consequences for Indonesia. It could jeopardize the overseas acceptance of Indonesian financial transactions, and lead to the imposition of higher risk premiums.

Yunus suggested that foreign creditors and agencies grouped in the Consultative Group on Indonesia (CGI) could push the government to seriously combat money laundering during their upcoming meeting Wednesday.

"Improvement in Indonesia is often triggered by pressure from the international community. If the pressure slows down there is usually no initiative coming from inside the government to keep the effort alive or to make small improvements," he said.

Indonesia a good place to learn dubious dealing

Jakarta Post - June 13, 2006

Rendi Akhmad Witular, Jakarta — As a world heavyweight in corruption, Indonesia may be a haven for novice corruptors and white-collar criminals around the world to learn how to launder money derived from illicit sources.

From the most simple method, smuggling cash overseas, to the most complicated manipulations involving insurance firms, banks and securities houses — there's a supporting infrastructure for all of them, such as easy ways to get a fake identification card.

The most simple method of money laundering is to deposit the dirty cash in several bank accounts, under different fake IDs, by breaking the money

into portions of less than Rp 100 million (US\$10,752).

Under the existing money laundering law, financial and non-financial institutions can only report a suspicious transaction if it involves a sum amounting more than Rp 500 million in a one-day transaction. But it is safer for money launderer if the transactions are made in much smaller portions so as to escape the suspicion of the institutions as the transactions seem to be made by ordinary individuals.

If a money launderer does not want to go through this relatively laborious process, he or she can simply go to tiny banks in villages and deposit all the money there without having to limit the amount.

With more than 2,100 micro-banks across the country, it is difficult for the Financial Transactions Reports and Analysis Center (PPATK), the country's money laundering watchdog, to monitor suspicious transactions at them, especially since the agency faces a lack of human resources.

A rather complicated method is to cooperate with big-fish gangsters in Jakarta or Surabaya to set up a company which engages in the gambling, prostitution, and hotel businesses. These companies cover their tracks by having operating licenses as automotive parts traders.

"This is the most popular method used by corrupt tax and customs officials because these businesses are the most liquid. Whenever they need cash they can obtain it quickly," said an official with the Finance Ministry.

"The companies that run the business also act as banks where the corrupt officials can easily store their illegal money. Since the inception of the PPATK it is not very safe to store such money in banks," said the official.

Aside from putting their money in property, jewelry and cars, money launderers also like to invest in restaurant and cafe businesses, most of which will be closed after operating for less than a year.

A more complicated money laundering method involving insurance firms has recently become popular. Based on a report from the PPATK, money launderers usually apply for insurance products and pay a large amount of premium.

Many insurance salesmen avoid the "know your customer" policy in order to get as much as the clients, although some evidences suggest some irregularities in the form of huge gap between the income receive by the policyholder with the paid premium.

In the capital market, money laundering usually occurs by indirectly selling and buying stocks, mutual funds and bonds using small securities houses, according to the PPATK.

After pooling enough funds, these small brokerages then turn over the investment portfolios to larger securities firms to avoid suspicion. In some cases, investment managers and lawyers are hired to work as executives in several companies on behalf of corrupt officials, using the positions as a cover while managing and laundering their money.

Watchdog reveals dirty linen hidden in police closet

Jakarta Post - June 13, 2006

Rendi Akhmad Witular, Jakarta — The uncovering last year of suspicious financial transactions involving the bank accounts of 15 police officers is believed to be only the tip of a corruption iceberg of monumental proportions that is slowly sinking whatever credibility the national force retains.

Apparently reluctant police investigators have so far managed to wrap up their inquiries in respect of accounts held by only two mid-ranking police officers, who, by coincidence, just happen to have no strong political connections. The findings of these investigations have been submitted to the prosecutors.

News of the suspicious transactions, believed to involve more than Rp 2 trillion (US\$217 million) in total, was leaked to the public in July last year by the Financial Transaction Reports Analysis Center (PPATK), which appeared to be taken aback by the scale of police involvement in money laundering and corruption.

It is worth noting that the highest take-home pay of a four-star police general is about Rp 10 million (\$950) a month.

After detecting the transactions in 2004, the watchdog decided to submit its findings to the police. They were only made public after police chief Gen. Sutanto took office in the hope that his reputation for integrity would serve to instill some seriousness into the investigations.

Among the police generals believed to be involved are former police chief Gen. Da'i Bachtiar, serving chief of detectives Comr. Gen. Makbul Padmanegara, and current Jakarta police chief Insp. Gen. Firman Gani. However, these officers have denied their involvement on a number of occasions.

Sources at the PPATK said the police were still slow in investigating the cases, apparently due to the influence the suspect generals still wield within the force, as evident from the fact that investigators had yet to request any further information on the transactions from the money-laundering watchdog.

"If they were serious, they would have at least asked us for more information that could reveal the involvement of high-ranking police officers. What they requested instead was only information on bank accounts held by officers with little or no influence in high places," said a source.

The leaking of the information on the dodgy accounts was the first piece of strong evidence to emerge about the amount of dirty money changing hands within the police, which is considered to be among the most corrupt institutions in the country.

Over the past two years, the PPATK has submitted hundreds of reports of money laundering involving the proceeds of high-profile graft cases to the

police for investigation, but very few of them have reached the prosecution service.

The PPATK has also uncovered a host of suspicious transactions involving the bank accounts of a number of mid-ranking police officers holding key positions in the Papua regional police. The money involved is believed to be the proceeds of illegal logging.

However, little headway has been made to date in the investigations.

The only high-profile case that appears to be under serious investigation at the present time is that involving well-known banker Eduard Cornelis William Neloe, who allegedly tried to launder some \$5.2 million through a Swiss bank.

Even in this case, however, after two months of investigation, there are no indications of when the police will submit a file to the prosecution service, leading to fears that the case may eventually be buried.

Neloe, a former president director of the country's largest lender, Bank Mandiri, managed to escape conviction earlier this year on charges of involvement in a banking scam worth billions of rupiah.

Court rules that Suharto's graft case should proceed

Agence France Presse - June 12, 2006

Jakarta — An Indonesian judge has ruled that the dropping of a long-running corruption case against former dictator Suharto was illegal and ordered the case reopened.

It was not immediately clear whether an appeal could be launched against the decision. The attorney-general's office announced last month that it had dropped a case against the ailing ex-president, who is accused of embezzling billions of dollars of state assets during his 32-year rule, due to his poor health.

Judge Andi Samsang Nganro, the judge reviewing so-called "pre-trial" suits against the office launched by three activist groups, backed their claim that the procedure the office followed had been illegal. "The case in the name of Suharto should be reopened and continued," Nganro said in his verdict.

Under the Indonesian legal system, a pre-trial suit challenges the legality of the pre-trial process, including decisions to drop cases.

Nganro said the penal code only permitted a case to be dropped if it was outdated, had already been heard in court or its defendant had died. "It cannot be halted based on a mere interpretation," Nganro said.

The attorney-general's office based its decision to drop the case on an interpretation of a Supreme Court decree which had recommended that Suharto only face trial if and when his physical condition improved. The office argued it could not implement the decree as Suharto's health had deteriorated too much.

Marwan Effendi, representing the attorney-general's office, said his team wanted time to decide whether to appeal. But Johnson Panjaitan, one of the plaintiff's lawyers, told the court that such a decision in a pre-trial ruling could not be appealed.

Due to ill health Suharto has never taken the stand for corruption charges levelled against him in 2000. These accuse him of misusing more than 500 million dollars from charitable foundations he set up during his rule.

The suits were filed by the Indonesian Association of Legal Attorneys and Human Rights Counselors, the so-called Advocacy Team for the Trial of Suharto, and an unnamed group of former student activists who opposed Suharto's rule.

Suharto, 85, stepped down amid mounting unrest in 1998 after ruling Indonesia with an iron grip.

ISLAM/RELIGION

Bashir says extremists misguided, Australia urges

monitoring

Agence France Presse - June 15, 2006

Solo — A firebrand Indonesian cleric who served time for his role in the 2002 Bali bombings has reportedly called Islamic extremists “misguided” holy warriors, as Australia’s prime minister called for him to be monitored.

Abu Bakar Bashir returned to the Muslim boarding school he founded in Central Java’s Solo late Wednesday after he was released from his maximum-security prison in Jakarta at the end of a nearly 26-month term.

Speaking to reporters amid a throng of ardent supporters who greeted him at the Al-Mukmin school, Bashir said alleged terror chief Noordin Mohammad Top and his followers should revise their violent methods.

"I would say that they are misguided mujahideen (holy warriors). Fighting using bombs or weapons in a peaceful zone is forbidden," Bashir said according to the Detikcom online news agency.

"So I hope they will review their methods. Hopefully there will not be any more violence in the future. All this time they have chosen the wrong way," the alleged leader of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) regional extremist group said.

JI has been blamed for a string of deadly blasts in Indonesia. Nevertheless, the cleric reportedly said the militants deserved to be called holy warriors because their intention was to defend Islam. Bashir also urged Muslims to fight for Islam using peaceful means.

"Every time there’s a bomb attack in this country, America cheers. They are more afraid of our peaceful struggle. It must be kept in mind that America’s plot today is to create havoc within Islam," he was quoted as saying.

Bashir was to spend Thursday resting and overseeing teaching at his school, his students told reporters. No media were permitted inside the school.

Bashir’s release provoked strong criticism from both Australia, which lost 88 of its nationals in

the Bali attacks which killed 202 people, and the United States.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard said Thursday he had written to Indonesia's president urging him to monitor Bashir's activities and noted there was "deep anger in the Australian community" at his release.

Howard told parliament his response to the release was "a reaction verging on hostility and disgust." He noted the UN Security Council had listed Bashir as a terrorist and that he was subject to an assets freeze, restricted international travel and a ban on accessing arms.

"We would hope that the Indonesian government would fully adhere to and support the implementation of its obligations under that part of the Security Council's resolution," Howard told parliament.

In Jakarta national deputy police spokesman Anton Bahrul Alam said Bashir's sermons at his boarding school would be monitored but police would not be doing the job.

"Mr. Bashir's sermons will be observed in a form of monitoring. It can be done by anyone, it can be done by the public there, it can be done by neighbourhood chiefs," Alam told reporters. "If his sermons are aligned with God's path, then go ahead," he said, adding that police would not be sent to the school.

Bashir, 68, was originally sentenced to 30 months for his role in a "sinister conspiracy" that led to the Bali bombings. He was cleared of terrorism charges and his sentence cut in August 2005 as part of regular remissions handed to prisoners.

Analysts here have said they did not believe Bashir holds the influence he once did over militants in Indonesia, with others — such as fugitive Malaysian national Noordin — emerging as major security threats.

Separately, the UN's food agency said Thursday it had cancelled a contract to deliver earthquake aid with an organisation because it was chaired by Bashir.

Does Bashir still wield influence among radicals?

Radio Australia - June 14, 2006

Indonesian cleric Abu Bakar Bashir has been released from a Jakarta prison, where he served two years for conspiracy in the 2002 Bali bombings. Bashir is viewed by the West as the spiritual leader of the regional militant network, Jemaah Islamiah. He has now been taken back to his home town of Solo in West Java. Yet already questions are being asked about the impact of Abu Bakar Bashir's release on counter-terrorism operations in southeast Asia.

Professor Zachary Abuzer, specialist on terror links in southeast Asia, who's on leave from Simmons College in Boston

Presenter/Interviewer: Sen Lam

Abuza: In terms of the impact on terrorism, I don't think it will be tremendous. I don't believe that Abu Bakar Bashir will be in a position where he will be able to authorise or command terrorist attacks. But it's a very important topic and a victory. He will be a media superstar in the country for the coming weeks. There will be a lot of news about his release and he has made it very clear that he's going on a road show to promote a book about his internment and so I think this will give a lot of a voice and really empower the Islamists in the country.

Lam: You think that prison has lent him greater credibility amongst the Jihadist groups?

Abuza: Oh, absolutely and it certainly didn't stop him from doing what he was doing. His sermons were being recorded. He was holding audiences. He had a secretary while in prison. So he believes and many Islamists would agree with this that he was in prison because of diplomatic interference by the Australian and American governments and so that probably gives him even greater credibility.

Lam: Abu Bakar Bashir I understand is still head of the Mujahadeen Council of Indonesia?

Abuza: Yes.

Lam: Is there any significance in that, given that the MMI is an umbrella body for groups that are longing for a theocratic state in Indonesia?

Abuza: Oh I think it's very important. The MMI was growing in strength considerably in 2000, 2001, 2002. For their National Congress in 2003, they had actually invited and the vice president of the country had accepted an invitation to speak. He cancelled at the last minute, right after the Marriot bombing in August 2003. And a lot of analysts wrote the MMI off and said that it was really no longer an important organisation. I disagree and I think that it's continued to be a very important umbrella organisation. It now is going to have its very charismatic head back in control and they're slowly getting their agenda pushed through.

Lam: So given the sensitive situation, what options are open to the Indonesian Government and indeed the neighbouring Australian Government, which of course has been following Bashir's impending release with some concern?

Abuza: Certainly. The Indonesian Government seems fairly non plussed about it. They said that they're not going to restrict any of his travel or movement. They said that they will keep an eye on him to a degree, but he is a free man. Legally, there's very little that they're going to do to him. JI is not an illegal organisation in Indonesia, and unless he can be linked to a terrorist attack, they will do nothing, and I don't believe that the Indonesian Government is going to criminalise JI as an organisation any time soon.

The US Government in April this year, had designated Abu Bakar Bashir as a terrorist financier and put him on the foreign terrorist organisation designation list and he's also been designated by the United Nations as a terrorist financier. To that end, Indonesia has a legal obligation to make sure no one can donate money to him or his organisations.

Lam: It might be worthwhile to remind our listeners that Abu Bakar Bashir was convicted not of any criminal activity or terrorist activity,

but for being part of a conspiracy and in fact for his influence if you like. Would that be a fair assessment?

Abuza: No, that's a very accurate assessment. The Indonesian Government has shown a very strong determination to go after members of JI that they can clearly link to terrorist attacks, but they've been unwilling to go after people within the organisation who are simply politically very protected like Abu Bakar Bashir. And so really since mid 2003, JI has not had a spiritual leader and I think that the fact that Bashir has been released will be a very important for the organisation.

Lam: What is your view of his role? Do you think that Abu Bakar Bashir really has it in him or has this belief in him that he wants to destroy America, that he wants to destroy Western institutions?

Abuza: Oh there's no doubt in my mind. He's made it very clear in his speeches that Australia, the United States, Britain, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, these governments should be attacked and brought down and he is just not even hidden his contempt for Western society and secularly institutions.

Gus Dur accused of desecrating Koran

Jakarta Post - June 14, 2006

Jakarta — Former president Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid has been reported by conservative clerics to the police for allegedly desecrating the holy Koran.

"Gus Dur has upset many Muslims with his comments when he described the Koran as a pornographic scripture," said Ahmad Chamid Baidhowi, the head of Al-Wadah Muslim boarding school in Central Java. He said he represented 500 Muslim religious leaders in Java and Madura.

"I showed the police 500 signatures of clerics from across Java and Madura who have demanded Gus

Dur retract his comments," Ahmad said.

Gus Dur made the comments while talking about the pornography bill last month during a talk show on Jakarta's FM Radio 68H. Arguing that describing something as pornographic was a subjective act, Gus Dur said even certain passages in the Koran could be interpreted as pornography.

Ahmad also reported the host of the Radio 68H M. Guntur Romli, and the show producer, Nurlambang, to police. Ahmad's lawyer, Mugiyono, said Gus Dur had violated Article 156 A of the Criminal Code. If found guilty he could be sentenced to five years jail, Mugiyono said.

Indonesia releases militant Islamic cleric

Associated Press - June 14, 2006

Robin McDowell, Jakarta — A reputed top leader of an al-Qaida-linked terror group that has been blamed for the 2002 Bali bombings and other deadly attacks walked free from prison Wednesday to cries of "God is great" from cheering supporters.

Abu Bakar Bashir, 68, had served 26 months for conspiracy in the Bali bombings, which killed 202 people and thrust Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, onto the front lines of the war on terror.

"I thank Allah that I am free today," a smiling Bashir said after emerging from a scrum of supporters and journalists waiting outside the gates of Jakarta's Cipinang prison. "I call on all Muslims to unite behind one goal, that is the implementation of Sharia law."

Australia and the United States, which have accused Bashir of being a key member of Southeast Asian terror group Jemaah Islamiyah, said they were disappointed at his release, as did Australian victims of the Bali blasts.

"It's hard to imagine how a leader of a gang... can get only two years for orchestrating to kill 200 people and injuring many more," said Peter

Hughes, 46, who suffered burns to 56 percent of his body in the attack. "It doesn't make sense." Eight-eighty of the Bali bombing fatalities were from Australia. Brian Deegan, whose 21-year-old son Josh died in the bombings, called Bashir's 26-month sentence "insulting."

Jemaah Islamiyah is accused of carrying out church bombings across Indonesia in 2000, the 2002 Bali bombings, attacks in the Indonesian capital in 2003 and 2004, and a triple suicide bombing on Bali last October. The attacks together killed more than 260 people. Indonesian police say the group has received funds from al-Qaida.

After being released, the preacher immediately set off for the boarding school he founded in central Java province, which is notorious for spawning many of the world's most populous Muslim nation's deadliest terrorists.

"The United States is a state terrorist because it is waging war against Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan," Bashir told reporters when asked about US accusations that he was a key member of Jemaah Islamiyah.

Bashir's freedom has raised concerns that he will energize Indonesia's small, Islamic radical fringe by making impassioned speeches at rallies and mosques, but few believe the stick-thin, softly spoken cleric will play any direct role in terrorism in the future.

Before the Bali blasts, Bashir was chiefly known for his vocal support of moves to make the secular country an Islamic state and his criticism of US policy toward Muslim countries. He has always maintained his innocence.

Indonesia's State Intelligence Agency chief, Syamsir Siregar, said he hoped Bashir would "regain his self-awareness and be willing to cooperate with us."

The leading expert on Jemaah Islamiyah said she didn't think his release would lead to more terror attacks, but added that Bashir was unlikely to help anti-terrorist investigators.

"I don't think it makes much difference whether he's released or stays in prison," said Sidney

Jones, Jakarta-based director of the International Crisis Group. "I think he will reinforce anti-Western feelings... but I don't think he'll necessary push people over the line from radical rhetoric to violence."

The US State Department expressed deep disappointment about what it called Bashir's light sentence. Spokesman Sean McCormack said Tuesday the court which convicted him concluded that he was a participant in "a sinister conspiracy to cause a fire or explosion resulting in deaths." But, he said, it is up to Indonesians and the Indonesian courts to interpret their own laws.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard said he, too, felt disillusioned at the news of Bashir's release. "Many Australians will see that particular outcome... as an extremely disappointing result," Howard told Parliament, adding that he shared that sentiment.

Bashir was found guilty of blessing the 2002 Bali attacks, but cleared of more serious terrorist charges, including heading Jemaah Islamiyah.

However, Indonesian and foreign intelligence officers say he played a key role in setting up the terror group, and led it from 1999 to 2002. His al-Mukmin boarding school was attended by many people convicted in terror attacks in Indonesia, and remains notorious for its hardline syllabus.

No evidence has ever been presented linking him to the execution, preparation or commission of terror attacks, and most analysts agree he had little operational role within Jemaah Islamiyah after 2002, often describing him as a spiritual leader.

The turnout at the prison on Wednesday was small despite efforts by his supporters to rally a large crowd, and no mainstream Islamic figures or politicians were present, underscoring his small and isolated following.

Freed Bashir mobbed by supporters

Australian Associated Press - June 14, 2006

Abu Bakar Bashir, the firebrand Islamic cleric accused of inspiring the first Bali bombings, has walked free from Jakarta's main prison and into the arms of hundreds of jubilant militant supporters.

Lifting his hands in the air an otherwise subdued Bashir muttered "I thank Allah" as he was mobbed by adoring fans, many in black "mujahidin" jackets.

Wearing a white skull cap, grey suit and red checked headscarf, the bespectacled 68-year-old made no mention of the 2002 Bali bombings, in which 88 Australians were killed, or a subsequent string of deadly terrorist attacks in Indonesia.

Instead he vowed to continue his struggle to bring strict Islamic sharia law to mainly-Muslim Indonesia. "To the lawyers who have enthusiastically defended me during the trial we will keep on fighting to uphold sharia," he said in a brief speech targeting moderate opponents.

"Upholding sharia is full of struggle," he added, before being whisked away with his son Rachim in a black van to begin a road trip to Solo, an ancient royal city in central Java where he teaches his radical brand of Islam at the Ngruki boarding school, dubbed the "Ivy League" of militant academies.

During his road trip he planned to visit earthquake survivors around nearby Yogyakarta.

Security was tight outside the prison with scores of police keeping watch. Scores of supporters were bused in to cheer Bashir. But three were killed in a car accident on their way from Solo.

Many in the crowd wore headbands and carried copies of Bashir's new book, *I Was Falsely Accused, The Days of Abu Bakar Bashir in Prison*. On its pages, the cleric denounces Prime Minister John Howard as "an infidel" and "enemy of Allah".

He also accuses Foreign Minister Alexander Downer of pressuring Indonesia to keep him in prison following an earlier 18-month jail sentence for minor immigration offences.

The Malaysian-born Bashir denied allegations by

western nations that he is the "emir", or spiritual head, of the Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist network.

He has called on all Indonesian Muslims to defend the nation "against violence". "We must believe that this country will be safe from all darkness under Islamic sharia," he said.

Bashir was released 15 minutes ahead of schedule and his chaotic departure from Jakarta's Cipinang Prison took his legal team by surprise.

One of Bashir's lawyers, Adnan Wirawan, said plans for the journey to Solo had been thrown into disarray by a small band of supporters who bundled him into a van.

"This is not the plan and right now we don't know where he is," Adnan told AAP. "All the plans that we have set up for him, it has been deviated. We have to find him so we can take him to Solo."

Australia's government has called on Indonesia to place Bashir under close surveillance amid warnings by some terrorist analysts that his release could inspire more terror attacks.

The United States said it was deeply disappointed with Bashir's release from what Washington believed had been a light 25-month sentence for giving blessings to the first Bali attacks.

Asked about possible police surveillance of his father, Rachim said he was unafraid. "I don't care about it. If they want to watch, go ahead," he said.

Lawyer Adnan said any move to place Bashir under surveillance would be a violation of his rights. "I expect that there will be a discrimination surveillance of him and that would be unconstitutional, because he is as free as everyone else in the country," he said.

Accusations Bashir had been the leader of JI would be proven wrong, Adnan said. "That is a paranoid version of the western media. He has never been a man of violence," he said. "What is to be afraid of? He has never been proven to kill a fly, an animal, he has never been proven to kill anyone."

The massive show of support for Bashir outside the

prison proved he was innocent, Adnan said. "People will not worship someone who is evil, who is a criminal, and if a lot of people still worship him it proves that he is an innocent man," he said.

Before Bashir's release, Indonesia's State Intelligence Agency chief, Syamsir Siregar, said he hoped Bashir would not cause any trouble. "We hope Bashir, after he has been jailed, will regain his self-awareness and be willing to cooperate with us," Siregar told politicians earlier this week.

Jemaah Islamiah is accused of carrying out church bombings across Indonesia in 2000, the Bali bombings in 2002, attacks in the Indonesian capital in 2003 and 2004, and a triple suicide bombing on Bali last October. The attacks together killed more than 260 people.

Bashir has little active support in Indonesia, where most Muslims follow a moderate form of the faith.

On his road trip Bashir criticised the United States. "The United States is a state terrorist because it is waging war against Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan," he told reporters when asked about US accusations he was a terror leader. Bashir made the remark after he stopped for midday prayers in the town of Tegal, 300km east of Jakarta.

Indonesia strikes back at Islamist hardliners

Asia Times - June 13, 2006

Gary LaMoshi, Denpasar — Last week was a rough one for jihadis in Indonesia. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's administration launched a long-overdue comprehensive campaign against violent Islamic extremists. In the country with the world's most Muslims, the outcome of Yudhoyono's initiative could prove far more significant in the global war for the hearts and minds of Muslims than the assassination of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Since the fall of General Suharto's New Order regime in 1998, Islamic extremists have asserted their right to enjoy the fruits of democracy and impose the will of Indonesia's Muslim majority as they presume to interpret it. They're unperturbed that most Indonesians, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, oppose their agenda. These radicals are no democrats. Politically educated under Suharto's reign of physical intimidation and intolerance of dissent, they merely wish to substitute their own version of autocracy and repression.

A handful of radical Islamic groups use violence as a first resort against their opponents, often with a wink from authorities. Violent extremism's renaissance began with police using vigilantes to extract protection money from reluctant bar owners and blossomed with the military's logistical support to send thousands of jihadis to the Maluku and central Sulawesi to undermine Abdurrahman Wahid's presidential election victory in 1999. Armed mobs draped in the white robes of Islam routinely attack churches, homes and businesses they accuse of various heretical views while police take no action and perpetrators escape prosecution. Government reluctance to stand up to thugs gives the impression of implicit approval, or that the extremists serve a higher authority.

Disrupting public order

Last July, thousands of vigilantes stormed a community of 700 members of Ahmadiyah, a Muslim splinter group in Bogor, a hill town outside Jakarta where President Yudhoyono makes his family home. The national Attorney General's Office promised to investigate Ahmadiyah, not the attackers, as "disruptive to the public order". Strikes on other Ahmadiyah facilities as well as a wave of attacks on Christian churches followed.

This April, a violent Islamic extremist campaign spearheaded by Islam Defenders Front (known by its Indonesian abbreviation FPI) stopped publication of a nudity-free local edition of Playboy magazine. Mobs threatened and attacked news vendors and distributors, seized magazines and stoned the publisher's office while police passively stood by. Mainstream groups joined the campaign against Playboy, offering mild regrets over any violence in pursuit of the righteous

cause.

Proposed anti-pornography legislation, laden with Islamist principles better suited for fundamentalist regimes such as Saudi Arabia, has become a focal point in the struggle over the creeping Islamization in Indonesia, which has more non-Muslims than Australia and Canada combined. The bill has also become a convenient excuse for violent displays of piety. After a rally in Jakarta last month supporting the legislation, extremist thugs attacked clubs in Jakarta and descended on the homes of prominent opponents of the bill. One target asked police for help as mobs harassed her, chanting slogans outside her house and telling her to leave town. Jakarta police chief Firman Gani demurred, saying he'd need a language expert to determine whether the chants violated the law.

Last straw

The last straw stirring Yudhoyono's ponderous government appears to have been an attack on former president Wahid on May 23. At an interfaith forum in the West Java town of Purwakarta, members of FPI and other radical groups forced Wahid, virtually blind and limited physically because of a series of strokes, off the stage. The radicals cited Wahid's opposition to the anti-pornography bill as an insult to Islam.

Mainstream Muslim groups Nahdlatul Ulama — formerly headed by Wahid — and Muhammadiyah, with a combined membership of 70 million, denounced FPI's action against Wahid. Hundreds of his young supporters from the National Awakening Party's paramilitary wing poured into the streets, clashing with FPI members.

It may not have been just the political cover from mass organizations and the prospect of further street violence that moved the government. If the extremists went after Wahid, a Muslim cleric and scholar as well as a former president, no politician could feel safe. While Wahid's iconoclasm and failed presidency — he was removed in favor of Megawati Sukarnoputri after two stormy years in office — have left him virtually powerless, he's still widely respected as a symbol of Indonesia's unique brand of Islam. Radicals might have miscalculated Wahid's political

impotence as a signal they'd win applause rather than condemnation for attacking him.

'Invisible hands'

The Yudhoyono administration's campaign against violent Islamists began innocently in the president's Pancasila Day speech on June 1. Pancasila (Sanskrit for "five principles") is the national philosophy enshrined by the nation's founders and subsequently corrupted under Suharto. In his speech, Yudhoyono called for a revival of Pancasila and accused "invisible hands" of trying to spread ideas against the nation's core principles of tolerance and pluralism. Although the "invisible hands" metaphor is hardly apt for white-robed mobs with stones and clubs, the message came through.

The speech was a nice bit of political shadow-boxing, indirectly confronting the extremists and recasting the debate in the government's chosen terms. But Yudhoyono is becoming famous for saying the right things, when he does finally speak out, and then failing to follow through with effective action.

This week, the action began. On Wednesday, Widodo Adi Suptjipto, coordinating minister for political, legal and security affairs, announced that the government will no longer tolerate groups that take the law into their own hands. While that may have been said before, Widodo added this important coda: the government will provide political cover for police and support their effort to enforce the law against these groups, no matter who their patrons may be.

When the Indonesian police receive political support, as in the Bali bombings of 2002, they've proved they can act professionally and decisively. The Bali investigation featured star officer Mangku Pastika in charge, and the spotlight now falls on Jakarta police chief Gani to show his stuff. Even though vigilantism isn't restricted to Jakarta, the capital has seen the highest-profile incidents and Gani stands out as a symbol of police indifference.

On Friday, Home Minister M Ma'ruf announced an agreement with legislative leaders to enact a law enabling the government to dissolve organizations

“disturbing security and order”. Though the vague wording smacks of Suharto-era repression, human-rights activists didn’t promptly unleash their usual complaints. Perhaps they realize that thuggery is a greater threat to rights than a potentially restrictive new law. They may also recognize that the real purpose of the proposal is to get political parties — Yudhoyono represents a tiny party and gets spotty support from the larger ones — and legislators to denounce vigilantism and withdraw their support from such groups.

These are all good, solid moves, breaking the government’s deafening silence on extremist violence. Expect more this week: Yudhoyono (or Vice President Jusuf Kalla) will meet with the leaders of major Muslim organizations, and each group’s head will denounce extremist violence as contrary to Islam. A similar meeting and announcement after the second Bali bombings last October reversed the groups’ lukewarm criticism of terrorist violence — it’s wrong but we understand why — and prompted a sea change in public opinion from indifference to condemnation of such acts of terror.

Condemning the radical thugs may prove a greater challenge for so-called mainstream leaders who have found common ground with extremists. Muhammadiyah chairman Din Syamsuddin also chairs the Indonesia Ulema Council, the would-be supreme authority for Islam in Indonesia whose fatwa against heretics and pluralism have provided religious cover for violence. The usual weasel is that the leaders condemn the violence but blame police for failing to prevent it, rather than the perpetrators. Onstage with the president, the leaders will lose their wiggle room.

Hypocrisy isn’t all being laid bare as violent extremism comes under counterattack. Playboy surprised the public and especially extremists with its second issue. After being run out of Jakarta by hardliners and suspending publication, the magazine didn’t fold but quietly relocated to predominantly Hindu Bali. The second Playboy includes blank pages dedicated to advertisers who’ve been threatened for placing ads in the first issue. While still free of nudity, June’s Bali-based French model Amar Doriane in a sheer negligee makes April’s Playmate “look like a naive

schoolgirl" according to one local newspaper. The Yudhoyono team wasn't alone in showing a bit of cheek toward violent radicals last week.

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A hardliner prepares for freedom

Melbourne Age - June 10, 2006

A hero's welcome awaits Australia's nemesis, Abu Bakar Bashir, the cleric convicted for blessing the Bali bombing, when he is freed on Wednesday after 251/2 months in an Indonesian jail.

Canberra is bristling at the early release of the founder and leader of the terrorist network Jemaah Islamiah — whose most deadly attacks were the 2002 Bali bombings, which took 202 lives, 88 of them Australian.

Meanwhile, Bashir's followers are planning celebrations and launching a book denouncing his time behind bars.

Jail has not mellowed Bashir. US President George Bush, Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and an "infidel" John Howard forced a weak-willed Indonesia to "fabricate" the case against him and extend his jail term, he writes.

Proofs of The Days of Abu Bakar Bashir in Prison, written with an acolyte who paid regular visits to his cell in Jakarta's Cipinang Jail, have been obtained by The Age. To be released next week, the book demonstrates that Bashir is determined to continue his crusade against the West, targeting Australia.

It was Downer who visited Jakarta in 2004 to insist he be arrested for assisting terrorism and the Bali attacks, claims the 68-year-old firebrand. Evidence from Bali bomber Amrozi that he blessed the "event" planned for Bali was

fictitious, he says.

"I was sure that the detention and the sentence by the district, provincial and the supreme courts was purely an order of Allah's enemies, especially the US and Australia. Repeatedly these two infidel countries intervened into my case. "That Indonesia had capitulated to "Allah's enemy, Aussie Prime Minister John Howard", was proof of the weakness of a state that was "easily humiliated by infidel human beings who tried to separate Papua from Indonesia in a cowardly way".

Bashir plans to travel across Indonesia with his message of defiance, a lightning rod for radical followers of Islam. JI, the organisation he co-founded, is fragmented and damaged but still an active threat, according to the International Crisis Group's Sidney Jones — who has interviewed many of its leading members. It retains an ultimate aim of creating an Islamic state stretching from Indonesia to the Philippines and beyond.

Rather than planning more terrorist attacks, Bashir's role will be to augment the moral battering ram being wielded by fundamentalists trying to impose Islamic sharia law. Expect Bashir to be "cheerleading" attempts to introduce a draconian anti-pornography law that would criminalise kissing and exposed navels, Jones predicts.

Bashir release to spark threat

The Australian - June 12, 2006

Natalie O'Brien — The scheduled release this week of Abu Bakar Bashir, alleged spiritual leader of the extremist group Jemaah Islamiah, could spark a fresh round of terror strikes.

Rohan Gunaratna, head of the International Centre for Terrorism and Political Violence Research, said the early release of Bashir on Wednesday would send a dangerous message to terror groups.

"Bashir is also the leader of the Majelis Mujahedin Indonesia... umbrella organisation of

jihad groups in Indonesia,"Dr Gunaratna said."He will mobilise them, he will politicise them. He has the credentials because he went to prison and he suffered. So people will join him, people will work with him. That's why he must stay in prison forever."

Bashir was sentenced to 30 months in jail for his part in the conspiracy surrounding the 2002 Bali bombing, which killed 202 people, including 88 Australians. He insists he is innocent and denies the existence of JI.

The al-Qa'ida-linked group has also been blamed for a string of bombings, including those at the Australian embassy and Marriott hotel in Jakarta.

JI was spawned by the militant group Darul Islam, which was the first organisation to seek the creation of an Islamic state in Indonesia in the 1950s.

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said last week there was nothing the Australian Government could do about Bashir's release. "He will no doubt go back to whatever private activities he wants to undertake,"he said."But the Indonesian Government no doubt will be as keen as we are in making sure he doesn't go back into activities that aid and abet terrorism."

While JI expert Sidney Jones agreed Bashir's imprisonment had probably increased his support base because he could be seen as a symbol of defiance against the West, she was not convinced his release would be a major security threat. "In some ways, the organisation has moved on and there are factions that don't look to Abu Bakar Bashir for leadership, such as the group around Noordin Mohammad Top (the JI mastermind of the Bali bombings)," Ms Jones told ABC radio.

JI has been quiet in recent months, largely because of a string of raids by the Indonesian police counter-terrorism force, Special Detachment 88.

Religious leaders rally for Pancasila

Jakarta Post - June 12, 2006

Jakarta — In a rally attended by thousands of people, religious leaders reaffirmed their allegiance to the state ideology Pancasila in a show of solidarity to counter a growing Islamic radicalism.

The rally took place at Proklamasi Monument in Central Jakarta on Saturday night, in conjunction with the 56th anniversary of Fatayat, the women's organization of Nahdlatul Ulama, the country's largest Muslim group.

Fatayat chairwoman Maria Ulfah Anshar, Reverend Emi Sahertian and Buddhist and Confucian leaders attended the rally, which was opened by NU chairman Hasyim Muzadi. In a speech, Ulfah expressed concern over political and religious practices that prevented women from exercising their basic rights.

"Discrimination takes its toll not only on NU women but Indonesian women in general," she said.

Militants warned to abide by the law

Jakarta Post - June 9, 2006

Tiarma Siboro, Jakarta — The government has issued a warning to members of hard-line groups in the country: You will face the full weight of the law if you promote unruly radicalism or are involved in acts of terror.

"Acts promoting anarchy, threats of terror, or moves to take the law into one's own hands are classified as crimes, which will be processed under the country's existing laws," Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Widodo Adi Sutjipto said Thursday.

"We have never tolerated any wrongdoing, regardless of who or what groups are implicated in it. Our (the government's) stance is clear, that we must enforce the supremacy of the law and equality before the law," he said.

Widodo chaired Thursday a meeting on political,

legal, and security affairs to discuss the presence of groups promoting violence and radicalism in the country.

"I know that law enforcers at all levels have faced a certain amount of pressure from various parties when they deal with these groups, and I am assuring them now that the government will provide protection to them when they carry out their duties," the retired four-star Navy admiral said.

Present during the meeting were Indonesian Military (TNI) chief Air Chief Marshal Djoko Suyanto, National Police chief Gen. Sutanto, Home Minister M. Ma'ruf, and expert advisor to the Justice and Human Rights Ministry Ramli Hutabarat.

"We put respect for people's freedom foremost in establishing mass organizations as stipulated in Law. No. 8/85 (on the freedom to organize). But if these (organizations') activities disturb public order, we do have a right to disband them," Ramli said.

Despite the tough talk, none of the officials would name the groups accused of promoting radicalism and violence.

Since the downfall of former president Soeharto, vigilante religious groups and gangs have mushroomed in the new era of political freedom.

The Islam Defenders Front (FPI) has frequently used religion to justify members' attacks against bars and nightclubs, minority religious faiths and political targets. It is also accused of using the threat of violence to leverage protection money from business premises.

Despite FPI members' frequent acts of vandalism, the police often do little to stop these attacks and only a few of the group's members have been arrested. This has led to accusations the police and the FPI are cooperating in some areas.

Political observers believe powerful politicians have helped establish and back many militant groups — like the Betawi Brotherhood Forum (FBR) — to put pressure on their political opponents, and not to promote religious ideas or morality.

These groups have attempted to legitimize

themselves by allying with the growing number of conservative but non-violent Islamic parties.

After a series of conservative fatwa were issued by the Indonesian Council of Ulema outlawing forms of secularism, pluralism and Islamic liberalism, these groups have also begun to target mainstream Muslim clerics.

Earlier this month, former president and Nahdlatul Ulama leader Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid was shouted down by FPI members during a speech in Purwakarta, West Java, while he was promoting interfaith dialog and religious tolerance.

Gus Dur has been open about his opposition to the pornography bill, which he says is an attempt to enforce a narrow interpretation of Islam on a multiethnic and multireligious society. An avowed secularist, he believes religion should be the private affair of the individual.

The public attack on the respected leader, which forced him to leave the podium, drew a strong reaction from NU followers, and was criticized by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

ECONOMY & INVESTMENT

Policy reform is the key

Jakarta Post - June 13, 2006

The World Bank, the coordinator of the Consultative Group on Indonesia (CGI), has again reminded the government of the vital importance of reform for the generating of sustainably high economic growth.

This is the central theme that may be drawn from the brief the World Bank prepared for the CGI creditor consortium, which will convene its annual meeting here Wednesday to assess Indonesia's economic problems and prospects, and its external financing needs for this fiscal year.

The challenges in the reform area lie on two fronts. While the pace of reform announcements has been much slower than expected, the implementation of policy reform has been even more disappointing. The cumulative impact of these problems is a

disappointingly slow recovery in public and private investment, both of which are sorely needed to provide work for the almost 12 million fully unemployed people, and the some 40 million underemployed people working in the informal sector.

Reforms in the areas of taxation, customs and excise, investment, labor regulations and public administration, including local government administration, are running far behind schedule. Consequently, we may conclude that President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's government, now in its second year in office, has been unable to take advantage of the momentum provided by its strong political mandate to fully restore investor confidence.

The government should be commended for the comprehensive packages of reforms in the infrastructure and investment sectors that were launched in the first quarter. However, their implementation has remained quite slow. Just look at how the second infrastructure summit has been postponed twice. It was originally scheduled for February, then was rescheduled to June but has now been again postponed until November because the implementation of many reforms in this sector has fallen behind schedule.

The adverse effects of the slow pace of reform are already reflected in less-than-expected employment growth.

The investment rate, although it has rising to 22 percent of gross domestic product, remains far below the 30 percent level achieved during the immediate pre-1997 crisis period. Yet more worrisome is the discouraging development in the relationship between overall growth and job creation. Put another way, the number of jobs created by one unit of economic growth is now much smaller than before 2000, apparently because rising unit labor costs are exceeding productivity gains, while relatively rigid labor rules have prompted new investors to eschew labor-intensive ventures.

Consequently, if this trend continues, annual economic growth of 7 percent will be required to provide work for the unemployed and new job seekers entering the labor market annually. This

is rather a bleak outlook because even with good progress with the reform agenda, it has been forecast that the country will only regain a high growth scenario of 7 percent a year beginning in 2009.

It is strongly recommended, therefore, that the government show stronger leadership in speeding up the reforms, not only in the economy but also in basic infrastructure and public administration (governance), including local administration.

Inadequate budget-management capabilities on the part of regional (provincial, regency and municipal) administrations has now become the single most important fiscal concern as these administrations now account for around 55 percent of public sector capital spending. The government's failure to conduct economic pump priming in the first semester through budgetary front-loading should be blamed mainly on the utterly abysmal capacity of local administrations to properly spend their resources.

As in its previous report, the World Bank, though referring to significant progress in the anticorruption drive, cited inefficiency and rampant corruption within the public sector, notably in the taxation, customs and excise, and business licensing arenas, as some of the most serious obstacles to new investment.

Neither the government nor the House of Representatives should take the World Bank's advice as an attempt to interfere in Indonesia's internal affairs. Neither, however, does it mean that the government should push through reforms simply to obtain foreign aid.

The creditors do not expect immediate completion of all the reforms needed to restore sustainably high economic growth, given the complex challenges involved. Nonetheless, they do want to see the government lay out a clear road map for reform, maintain policy coherence and remain on the right track.

The basic reality is that the creditors will simply be wasting their money if, for example, corruption continues to undermine the effectiveness of government investment expenditure, and reforms in the economic, public-

sector governance and judicial sectors are not carried through.

Regions still coming up short in drawing investment

Jakarta Post - June 13, 2006

Benget Simbolon Tnb., Jakarta — Most regencies and municipalities are still lagging in creating attractive investment conditions five years after the regional autonomy law gave them greater power to manage their economic affairs.

The poor investment climate was shown in the latest annual survey conducted by the Regional Autonomy Watch (KPPOD), in cooperation with the Asia Foundation and USAID.

The survey, made to assess the performance of regions last year in improving the investment climate, found the average investment competitiveness score of the regencies and municipalities was only 6.04, far below the maximum score of 9.

"Overall, this survey found that the investment competitiveness of regencies/cities in Indonesia is still unsatisfactory," said KPPOD, a non-governmental organization specializing in research on regional autonomy implementation.

Its findings will be a sharp wake-up call to the central government, which is trying to secure US\$426 billion in investment by 2009 to forge higher economic growth and create more employment.

Investment competitiveness was assessed based on five factors accorded varying degrees of importance: Security, politics and sociocultural interests accounted for 27 percent; local economic potential (23 percent); labor (18 percent); physical infrastructure (17 percent) and institutional considerations (15 percent).

According to the survey, the major weaknesses of the regions are found in institutional and labor factors. Their average competitiveness ratings

were low in these two areas, at only 5.43 and 5.38 respectively.

Last year, the KPPOD surveyed 228 regencies and municipalities as compared to 214 regencies/municipalities in 2004. There are 440 regencies/municipalities in Indonesia. Based on the latest survey, Batam municipality in Riau Island province and Gianyar regency in Bali were recognized as the best investment destinations after receiving the highest average scores in all five categories.

There are five other regencies and five other municipalities which received the KPPOD investment award as winners in each of the categories.

For security, politics and sociocultural factors, the honors went to Maros regency in South Sulawesi and Denpasar municipality in Bali.

For the economic factor, the winners are East Kutai regency and Samarinda municipality, both in East Kalimantan.

Pangkajene Island regency in South Sulawesi and Kediri municipality in East Java came out on top for labor.

Maros regency in South Sulawesi and Balikpapan in East Kalimantan were selected for institutional considerations.

For institutional factors, Barru regency in South Sulawesi and Sawahlunto municipality in West Sumatra won.

SOE performance in 2005 fails to impress

Jakarta Post - June 13, 2006

Urip Hudiono, Jakarta — The country's state-owned-enterprise (SOE) sector is still in poor shape, with its overall financial performance in 2005 only showing a slight improvement over the previous year.

A total of 108 out of 139 SOEs — or 77 percent — booked combined profits of Rp 40.6 trillion

(US\$4.3 billion) last year, State Minister for State Enterprises Sugiharto told a House of Representatives hearing Monday, while 31 (22 percent) suffered combined losses of Rp 6.11 trillion.

Although the number of profitable SOEs in 2005 in percentage and profit terms increased from the previous year, the number in the red also increased.

In 2004, 114 out of 158 SOEs (71 percent) enjoyed total profits of Rp 37.7 trillion, while 27 (17 percent) suffered losses of Rp 4.8 trillion.

"Last year was a bit better for our SOEs, with 82 having improved their performance — 68 that booked profits in 2004 further increased them, while 14 that experienced losses managed to reduce those losses," Sugiharto said.

Last year's SOE financial performance snapshot included 45 unaudited and preliminary financial results. The State Ministry for State Enterprises expects all the SOEs to have submitted their audited accounts by June 30.

Sugiharto explained that last year's unfavorable economic conditions — with major fuel price hikes, high inflation, soaring interest rates and a volatile rupiah — were the main reasons for the only slight improvement in the performance of the country's SOEs, which the government is actually relying on to beef up budget revenues.

"Fuel-sensitive SOEs were burdened with higher operating costs last year, with state power firm PLN being the worst affected," he said. "Several state lenders were also affected by Bank Indonesia's stricter lending rules and legislation forbidding them from adopting more flexible debt restructuring schemes," he said.

The government's failure to address rampant corruption and inefficiency in many of the country's SOEs over the years may also be a contributing factor in their poor performances.

Debt-ridden state airlines Garuda Indonesia and Merpati Nusantara could even be grounded by the end of this year without a bailouts. The State Ministry's efforts to raise money for this from more profitable SOEs is hampered by their own

unconvincing performances, Sugiharto said.

SOEs contributed Rp 12.7 trillion in dividend payments to last year's budget, only slightly higher than the Rp 12 trillion target set for them. They are expected to contribute Rp 23.2 trillion this year.

The government is also hoping to make Rp 1 trillion from SOE privatizations this year. The State Ministry canceled last year's Rp 3.5 trillion privatization target, citing the unfavorable market situation and a reluctance to press ahead due to nationalistic sentiment, and decided to try to boost SOE profits instead.

Real sector to remain stagnant

Tempo Interactive - June 9, 2006

RR Ariyani, Jakarta — It is estimated that the growth of the real sector will remain stagnant this year. In addition to the continuing high interest rate, there is not yet internal restructuring from the real sector itself.

"As long as there is not yet industry restructuring, because the credit is at a standstill, the real sector is stuck," said Imam Sugema, Head of the Institute for Development of Economics and Finance, yesterday.

According to Sugema, the stagnation will not only be affected by the high interest rate. For when the rate still stood at 7.5 percent last year, the real sector was still not capable of achieving loans.

Gunadi Sindhuwinata, Chairperson of the Indonesian Motorcycle Industry Association, has predicted that the growth of the motorcycle industry will decrease by 30 percent. "While the motorcycle's growth in 2005 has increased 30 percent compared with 2004, we have a 30 percent decrease this year or going back to the position of two years ago," he said.

According to Sindhuwinata, the high interest rate

shows high inflation. Therefore, the market will not react and shift the goods that will be up for sale. "It means that the demand for motorcycles will increase. As a result, manufacturers must produce efficiently and adapt their production to market demand," he explained.

Meanwhile, Eddy Widjanarko, the Chairperson of Indonesian Footwear Association, has denied Bank of Indonesia's statement which has estimated that the real sector is not prepared to receive a loan disbursement.

Widjanarko said, the manufacturing and exporting performances are undergoing an increase. "It's now advantageous for footwear industries to produce. A five percent sales increase from exporting in 2005, or of evaluating US\$ 1.5 billion, has shown that this industry remains thoroughly tested and prepared to receive loan disbursements," he said.

OPINION & ANALYSIS

The export of refugees

Sydney Morning Editorial - June 15, 2006

It is a place where the usual rules do not apply. Inmates can be held indefinitely, their fate decided without recourse to the accepted legal and administrative processes. No, not the American prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, but Nauru under Australia's revised detention regime for asylum seekers. Even a Government-dominated Senate committee has had no option but to condemn it.

In recent years, the stream of boat people which prompted the Government's hard line against asylum seekers has shrunk to less than a trickle, and the Government felt safe in smoothing the sharp edges of the detention regime.

It was following not only its better instincts — as articulated by the likes of the Victorian Liberal MP Petro Georgiou — but the recommendations of recent inquiries. But that softer approach changed when immigration officials granted temporary protection visas to 42 Papuan asylum seekers who had arrived by boat in northern Australia. Indonesia was enraged and, ever since, Australia has been trying to placate it.

Australia decided that asylum seekers arriving by sea — no matter where in Australia they landed — would be processed offshore, in Nauru, and resettled in third countries. The Senate's Legal and Constitutional Committee has now found serious shortcomings in the proposed legislation. There is no time limit on detention. Asylum seekers have no right to settle in Australia, even if they can't go anywhere else. Detainees do not have access to independent legal advice or a right to an independent review of their case. The committee is also very concerned at the detention of women and children on a remote Pacific island nation, and at the lack of an independent authority — such as the Commonwealth Ombudsman — to oversee the whole exercise. Unsurprisingly, the committee's first choice is to scrap the legislation rather than try to fix it.

The Government's hard line reflects what it takes to be the realpolitik of relations with Indonesia. It believes that accepting Papuan asylum seekers will inevitably be read as support for Papua's independence movement and as criticism of Indonesia's administration in the province.

However, in its concern for the sensitivities of Indonesia, the Australian Government has been too ready to disregard the rights of asylum seekers. The Government should be ready to accept those seeking refugee status, and to assess their claims in Australia. Asylum seekers should be treated with proper regard for their self-respect — and Australia's. There is no credit in a supine return to the Pacific Solution.

Answering to Jakarta

Melbourne Age - June 15, 2006

Scott Burchill — The Howard Government's decision to subcontract the processing of asylum seekers to Australia's poorest neighbours is more than simply a dereliction of its sovereign responsibilities.

The resumption of offshore processing confirms that Canberra intends to solve its diplomatic problems by altering the nation's immigration and

refugee policies. This strategy is unwise, unpopular and guaranteed to fail.

Its primary flaw is that it only addresses the symptoms rather than the cause of the problem. By granting temporary protection visas to 42 Papuan asylum seekers in March, the Immigration Department determined that if they were to be forcibly returned home they would face a "well-founded fear of persecution".

Terminate the human rights abuses and the problem goes away. This is the message Prime Minister John Howard should have delivered to visiting Indonesian MPs this week. Instead, Jakarta continues to insist that the problem is of Australia's making, asking for the visas to be revoked while demanding Australia "prove" its commitment to Indonesia's territorial integrity with "action".

Presumably these are the same individuals who object to Canberra's insistence that Indonesia comply with international law after the release of Abu Bakar Bashir, on the grounds that it is interference in Indonesia's domestic affairs. The United Nations obliges Indonesia to freeze the radical cleric's assets and prevent him from travelling overseas and obtaining weapons.

The Howard Government's desire to pass even tougher laws on asylum seekers suggests it is fully aware of Jakarta's crimes in Papua, that it expects them to continue, and that as a consequence more Papuans are likely to risk their lives by trying to escape the territory.

Its response is to ignore the cause of the problem — which would be called state terrorism if it were occurring elsewhere — and make it more difficult for future asylum seekers to establish their claims. The Government refuses even to talk about what it discovered is going on in the province or explain why the persecution continues under what Liberal senator George Brandis described as "the most liberal ruler that Indonesia has had and is likely to have". Canberra's expectations of the newly democratic society seem extraordinarily low.

There is no place for torture, political persecution, grand larceny or cultural genocide in

an authentic democracy. By trying to assuage Jakarta's irrational fears, Canberra only avoids the issue and ensures that both the abuses and the paranoia will continue. Has it learnt nothing from Indonesia's 24-year occupation of East Timor? A stable and productive bilateral relationship is important but it will never be built as long as both governments conspire to play down the crimes of one side.

Contriving a moral panic about border protection might have worked once for the Howard Government. However, it may not work again, despite the absence of principled opposition from the ALP. A recently commissioned poll showed that 74 per cent of those who were asked did not want the Government to alter its immigration policies to improve ties with Jakarta. This view is shared by an all-party Senate committee that regards the new laws as unworkable and an "inappropriate response" to pressure from Jakarta. Even the few remaining liberals in the Liberal Party are prepared to break ranks with their conservative colleagues unless they are granted concessions by Amanda Vanstone and Howard.

John Howard and Alexander Downer are as committed to Papua's retention inside the republic as their counterparts in Jakarta. Their preference, however, is not shared by the indigenous people of the province, who want to leave the republic politically and, now, physically. The Government's problem is it cannot resolve the contradiction within its own policy.

One arm of its bureaucracy (Immigration) has publicly highlighted a running sore that another arm (Foreign Affairs) has been doing its best to conceal and ignore, rather than treat.

The Government is stuck in a dilemma of its own making, but its response in effect is to tell the Immigration Department "you got us into this mess so you can get us out of it". The department won't succeed because the problem is not its to solve. Canberra's clumsy efforts to make the lives of desperate asylum seekers even worse by incarcerating them in legal black holes such as Nauru only panders to those responsible for their misery.

These efforts may well be "appreciated" in Jakarta

because it diverts public attention from what has been going on in Papua since a sham plebiscite on integration there four decades ago. They may not be seen in the same light, however, by a domestic population that is increasingly concerned by a government that so easily trades its legal processes for diplomatic expediency.

[Scott Burchill is senior lecturer in international relations at Deakin University.]

War against dirty money

Jakarta Post Editorial - June 15, 2006

With its efforts to combat money laundering becoming increasingly feeble, Indonesia faces the risk of being internationally blacklisted again as a haven for dirty money and a high-risk country for international financial institutions.

Indeed, the fact that not a single person has been brought to court on charges of money laundering is a truly dismal record for Indonesia, whose government is perceived as one of the most corrupt in the world and where large cash transactions are still the rule rather than the exception.

It is high time to remind the government of the urgency of the issue. Indonesia cannot sit back and relax because it was removed by the Financial Action Task Force — the global money laundering watchdog — from its list of non-cooperative countries and territories in February 2005. The country could be put back on the blacklist, which would sharply increase transaction costs for Indonesian companies overseas.

It has indeed been four frustrating years for the Financial Transaction and Report Analysis Center (PPATK) — the Indonesian financial intelligence unit — which was set up to implement the 2002 law on money laundering. The center has virtually been fighting single-handedly against money launderers, without adequate support from law enforcement bodies such as the National Police and Attorney General's Office.

The problem is that the PPATK is authorized only to analyze reports of suspicious transactions from financial institutions, and to submit money laundering cases to the police for further investigation and prosecution.

So far, the center has received almost 5,000 reports of suspicious financial transactions. Strong evidence was gathered in 450 of these cases and forwarded to law enforcement bodies for further investigation and prosecution. But not a single case has reached the courts.

The financial intelligence unit is so frustrated with the lack of cooperation from the National Police that the center's chairman, Junus Husen, dropped a "bomb" last August, disclosing that there were strong indications of money laundering involving hundreds of billions of rupiah related to the personal accounts of 15 noncommissioned officers and generals in the National Police.

We believe in the credibility of the PPATK report because its legal and financial experts only forward to the National Police those cases with strong indications of money laundering.

The fact that not a single case has reached the courts almost one year since Husen forwarded the report to the police is just further evidence of the non-cooperative attitude — or even resistance — on the part of law enforcement bodies, and the acute lack of political leadership on the part of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to intervene in such an important area of law enforcement.

The mentality of corruption within law enforcement agencies such as the National Police, rather than inadequate technical competence to investigate complex financial transactions, is mainly responsible for the miserably weak enforcement of the law on money laundering. Cooperation between law enforcement agencies and financial service companies and other government institutions, such as the customs and tax services and the stock market watchdog, is vital for the effective enforcement of the money laundering law. Information sharing is the brain of the drive against money laundering.

True, money laundering was a completely new concept within Indonesian financial systems when

the anti-money laundering campaign was launched in early 2002. But over the past four years, we believe, the National Police and Attorney General's Office should have trained an adequate number of personnel to build up strong money laundering cases using the evidence forwarded by the PPATK.

We also get the impression that there is a lack of national ownership of the law against money laundering because the legislation was hastily enacted under strong pressure from the United States, which wanted the world to crack down on the flow of money to international terrorists after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

However, despite the initial focus on stopping the flow of money to terrorists, fighting money laundering is an important component of Indonesia's battle against corruption, tax evasion and numerous other crimes. Because the crimes covered by the money laundering legislation are so diverse, the fight will hit almost all major sources of dirty money, including corruption, drug trafficking, smuggling, bribery, banking crimes, drug crimes, terrorism and human trafficking.

An effective anti-money laundering campaign will make it extremely difficult for those involved in corruption, tax evaders and other big criminals to bring their ill-gotten money into the legal financial system.

Certainly, amending the law on money laundering to give the PPATK more teeth could go a long way toward strengthening this campaign. But a strong order from President Yudhoyono to the National Police and the Attorney General's Office to fully cooperate with the PPATK would be adequate for now to bolster the anti-money laundering efforts without having to wait for the long process of amending the law.

Human rights should not take a back seat to appeasement

Melbourne Age Editorial - June 14, 2006

Decisions about immigration policy must be made independently from concerns about our relationship with Indonesia.

Should any doubt remain about the Howard Government's mastery of the art of realpolitik, the valuing of the practical over the moral, it will be erased by events this week in Canberra. It is surely no coincidence that, as the Senate considered its response to tough new immigration legislation, Indonesia not only reinstated its ambassador — recalled in March in protest at Australia's decision to grant protection visas to 42 Papuans — but dispatched a five-person Government delegation to ensure that this country would not provide support for separatists in Papua.

The trip appears to have served its purpose. A day after Coalition senators expressed concern about the morality of the proposed legislation, Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone met the delegation led by former Wahid government minister Dr Muhammad Hikam and assured them that Australia did not support Papua's separatist movement, although stopped short of acceding to their wishes that the visa decision be reviewed.

Senator Vanstone's defiant defence of the new laws, saying they "balanced" the priorities of meeting Australia's international obligations, protecting borders and keeping "good and stable" relations with Indonesia, is a clear demonstration of that realpolitik.

In January she pledged that her department would not be swayed by foreign policy considerations in deciding refugee claims. "Australia has always made decisions in relation to protection claims on the basis of the merit of the claim," she said. "And that has to be the case, rather than taking into account whether we'll upset one or other of Australia's friends and allies." What a difference a few months and a great deal of political leverage makes.

It is difficult to credit that the legislation under consideration can be drawn up in a country whose leader regularly expresses pride in its democratic traditions. Australia is a signatory to international human rights agreements; it long ago overturned the infamous White Australia Policy and, in the 1970s, led the world in welcoming

Vietnamese “boat people”, the first major influx of refugees to reach our shores.

The new law is an abomination of this tradition. It will force future asylum seekers arriving by boat to be processed offshore in places such as Nauru, in effect excising the entire Australian coastline from our migration zone.

Children will once again be detained, genuine refugees (and most who have reached our shores have been found to be genuine) will be denied the protection of the Australian legal system and successful applicants may be detained indefinitely until they are accepted by a third country.

The changes are an indication that much-vaunted moves to improve immigration practices, notably the decision last year to revoke the mandatory detention of children and to allow the release of long-term detainees into the community, were an aberration.

The criticism has been loud and clear. Opposition Leader Kim Beazley called the move to offshore processing unnecessary appeasement; Liberal senator Judith Troeth said the bill appeared to be intended to stop even genuine asylum seekers coming to Australia; and Queensland Nationals senator Barnaby Joyce said decisions about asylum should not be based on political expediency.

Despite the internal rumblings, the Prime Minister is confident the legislation will pass. John Howard seems to have paid greater attention to the Indonesian Government than to Australia’s human rights obligations or the views of his own backbench. But he should not be too complacent.

Coalition politicians have previously shown an admirable commitment to human rights. They are well aware that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights accords people the right “to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution” and does not make exceptions for political pragmatism.

As The Age has previously acknowledged, this is a sensitive issue with no easy answers. But if Australia’s relationship with Indonesia has indeed matured, our northern neighbour should be able to accept this country’s honouring of its

international obligations on human rights.

Who protects the people?

Jakarta Post Editorial - June 10, 2006

It is no secret that public trust toward police has been falling, and the recent threats and the version of terrorism carried out by groups claiming to represent certain ethnicities and religions have apparently made things worse. Police, who institutionally have the legal right to protect the citizens from violence, have failed to do what they should to address complaints lodged by anxious citizens.

Arbitrary actions against nightspots, including crimes and violence, by certain groups of people carrying religious banners or claiming to be from certain ethnicities have become rampant. The police have been unwilling to take prompt and proper actions to stop them. If police officers happen to be at the scene, they usually take no action and just watch.

Not long ago a group of people vandalized buildings they believed were being used for religious activities. Both the buildings' owners and local police were helpless, leaving the impression that the illegal actions were legitimate. The police made no effort to prevent the group from acting further.

Such incidents have happened several times in many parts of the archipelago. Jakarta is not an exception.

The most blatant example of arbitrary acts by certain groups in the capital city was when members of an organization carrying religious symbols destroyed nightspots which, according to the organization's members, had become dens of prostitution and drug trafficking. Surprisingly, the police took no action.

The most recent controversies occurred when several artists joined a rally opposing the anti-pornography bill. Several artists reported to the

police later that they had been harassed by radical groups claiming to be of a certain ethnicity.

One rally participant was shocked when a large number of strangers flocked to her house, chanting slogans in support of the anti-pornography bill and urging the artist to leave the capital city or apologize to the organization for marching in the rally.

Cornered, the artist tried to seek legal help, while the group continued its activities. It visited another artist, demanding that person's apology for joining the demonstration. Worse, the group members condemned participants of the rally, calling them immoral and vowing to "give lessons" to those opposing the anti-pornography bill.

When legal procedures were followed, the response from the police was another shock. City Police Chief Insp. Gen. Firman Gani said he wanted to summon a language expert (to correctly interpret the condemnation against the rally participants) before responding to the reports.

It was a little strange that, according to Gani, the police could do nothing without written reports from someone about the intimidation, terrorizing and other improper behavior. He said police would act only after destructive actions took place. Contrary to statements, not one arrest was made when a group of people claiming to be from a religious-affiliated organization attacked and damaged the building housing the office of the controversial Playboy magazine in South Jakarta.

The police's position on protecting the citizens from such groups' indiscriminate actions has been ambiguous, despite National Police Chief Gen. Sutanto's pledge to take tough actions against any form of thuggery or radicalism.

The unresolved and improperly handled thuggery and radicalism obviously became a special agenda item for the coordinating meeting among Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Widodo Adi Sucipto, Home Affairs Minister M. Ma'ruf, TNI Chief Air Chief Marshal Djoko Suyanto and Gen. Sutanto. The meeting, which took place on Thursday, clarified that no individuals or organizations have the legal right to carry out

violence against others. This means the law must be respected and properly enforced, and everybody deserves the same legal protection.

The ball is now clearly in the police's court. According to the coordinating meeting, Firman Gani has no more excuses not to fight radical groups.

The public impression that the police lack the will to face radical organizations will then fade away in line with the growth of civil society. In this way, the police can regain their lost public trust.

Time to talk straight

Sydney Morning Herald Editorial - June 9, 2006

When the former prime minister Paul Keating produced a bilateral security treaty with Indonesia in 1995, his conservative opponents thought he had gone troppo.

They didn't criticise the idea of a treaty with Indonesia, focusing instead on the "secret negotiations" with then president Soeharto which had led up to it. It also became part of their story that Keating was tilting Australia away from its traditional Western alliances.

The treaty — between an Australian leader only months from election defeat and an Indonesian president two years from regime collapse — was repudiated by Jakarta in the 1999 East Timor crisis, possibly out of a misapprehension that Australia's Prime Minister, John Howard, was about to repudiate it first. More than a symbol of closeness, it had come to represent leaders out of touch.

Now symbolism is back in. Mr Howard will announce a "historic" security pact this month when he meets the Indonesian President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

The idea was floated by the Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, soon after Dr Yudhoyono took office in October 2004, and has

been discussed since.

After the sudden chill caused by Australia granting asylum to a group of 42 Papuans, it has been pushed to the fore as a sign of reconciliation.

Strangely for a Coalition that complained about secrecy in the Keating case, we are learning more about the treaty from Jakarta than from Canberra.

From what we are told, few Australians will disagree with the treaty, since it largely encompasses what the two countries are doing already, such as co-operating against terrorism. Nor will Australians object to professing support for Indonesia's territorial integrity, especially as the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Hassan Wirayuda, has made it clear Jakarta doesn't expect any gag on advocates of Papuan independence speaking out in Australia.

What will stick in the throats of fair-minded Australians is the political price of the treaty: shipping off future Papuan asylum seekers to dreary camps in Nauru or Manus Island, thus stripping away their rights to legal and administrative appeal under Australian refugee law. Whether more asylum seekers come our way will depend partly on the behaviour of Indonesian security forces and authorities in Papua, and partly on whether Papuans believe they need international publicity to get their grievances addressed.

The treaty's idea of deepening co-operation between the armed forces will also advance or falter with Dr Yudhoyono's reforms in the Indonesian military, the TNI. He has sidelined some of the more sinister generals, and the army has been surprisingly well behaved during the Aceh peace process.

However, the President has shelved proposals to remove the TNI's "territorial" role which allows it to parallel and supervise civil government. The plan of his Defence Minister, Juwono Sudarsono, a civilian, to wean the forces off their business activities — and the corruption that goes with them — may also be optimistic.

Still, most Australians will say "why not?" rather

than “why?” to this treaty. The diplomatic roundabout still brings us back to the need for Australians and Indonesians to work on the relationship, and the treaty will help.