

Indonesia News Digest #23 - June 16-23, 2006

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ACEH

Call for formation of Aceh truth & reconciliation commission

Aceh Kita - June 23, 2006

Radzie, Banda Aceh — Civil activists in Aceh are

urging the Indonesian government to immediately form an Acehese Truth and Reconciliation Commission (KKR) and Human Rights Court in order to resolve problems that took place in the past. The call was conveyed by a number of Acehese activists after they decided to resign from the Aceh Reintegration Agency.

According to the former executive director of the Forum of Acehese Non-Government Organisations, TAF Haikal, a future KKR and human rights court would not involve the disputing parties. "We are proposing the immediate formation of a committee, within which the disputing parties are not involved. The institution would be independent", Haikal said when speaking with Aceh Kita a short time ago.

Likewise, the executive director of the Coalition of Human Rights Non-Government Organisations, Faisal Hadi, said that a KKR and human rights court is desperately needed in order to resolve problems of human rights violations that occurred in the past. According to Hadi, the formation of an Acehese KKR has been hindered because the KKR at the national level has yet to be formed. This is despite the fact that 40 candidate members for the KKR have already taken part in a fit and proper test yet not one has been selected by the president.

"By September 2005, the government should have already formed the KKR at the national level. But up until now the president has not selected any of the 40 existing candidates", said Hadi.

The Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding says that a KKR will be formed in Aceh by the national KKR with the task of formulating and determining a means of seeking reconciliation.

According to Hadi, a future KKR in Aceh could take as example the KKR that was formed by the South African government in resolving human rights violations that took place during the Apartheid period. "Of course the South African model doesn't have to be applied in its entirety, but what's wrong with trying it first (trial and error)", he said. [dzie]

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Civil activists condemn TNI statement on SIRA

Aceh Kita - June 23, 2006

Radzie, Banda Aceh — A statement by Indonesia's senior representative on the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM), Major General Bambang Darmono, which categorised the Aceh Referendum Information Center (SIRA) as an illegal organisation has been condemned by civil activist groups in Aceh.

Criticisms and protests were expressed by the Coalition of Aceh Human Rights Non-Government Organisations, the Traditional Society Communication Network (JKMA), the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras), the Alliance of Student Executive Councils (ABEM), the Acehnese Civil Society Task Force (ACSTF), the Muhammadiyah University Student Executive Council (BEM), the Anti Corruption Movement (Gerak) and SIRA.

According to Taufik Abda from JKMA, the Indonesian military (TNI) does not have the authority to decide on the status of or disband civil organisations. A decision to disband a civil organisation lies entirely with the civil government, in this case the ministry of home affairs or the regional government. Even if SIRA and other civil organisations are declared illegal, he said, the decision must be made by the government or the courts based on existing laws and not by military officers.

"An accusation by a military officer as to whether an organisation is legal or not, is realm of the work of the civil authorities, not the military", said Abda during a press conference at the offices of the Coalition of Aceh Human Rights Non-Government Organisations in Banda Aceh on Friday June 23.

According to Abda, the labeling of SIRA as an illegal organisations, as in the case of fronts that were created to fight and quash the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), represents an attempt by the military to use coercion and terror against civil activists. Moreover, at this time these activists

are struggling for the ratification of the Draft Law on Aceh Government (RUU-PA), the contents of which are in accordance with the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

"There are concerns that this intimidation is to silence friends who are putting pressure on [those conducting] the deliberations of the RUU-PA", he said. "The military authorities are also using shock therapy against civil society [groups] that are participating in actions launched by SIRA".

The Helsinki MoU says that the government must disband illegal groups in Aceh. By illegal groups it is meant the militia who in their activities use weapons and violence. SIRA meanwhile, has never used violence or weapons said Abda.

Because of this therefore, Abda deeply regrets the statements made in the mass media by the commander of the Iskandar Muda Territorial Military Command Major General Supiadin AS and Darmono, that SIRA is an illegal organisation.

"Why not invite us (civil organisations) to hold an open dialogue on the matter. Why must [they] spread terror through the mass media", asked Abda who is also a SIRA activist. What is most regrettable said Abda, is that a high-ranking TNI officer made the statement that SIRA is an illegal organisation.

In relation to holding an open dialogue and debate, the Coalition of Aceh Human Rights Non-Government Organisations declared that it is ready to mediate between civil groups, the government and military, in order to straighten out the issue.

Speaking in the same vein, Kontras Aceh coordinator Asiah said that the statements by Supiadin and Darmono are evidence that the military is encroaching on civil authority. "If there are illegal [organisations], why make an example of SIRA, when we know that their activities are not disrupting the peace process", said Asiah.

Meanwhile, during a press conference the day before at a restaurant in Banda Aceh, SIRA stated that they are not an illegal organisation dispute the accusations by the TNI. "We have already made

it clear to all parties, including the AMM, that SIRA is not campaigning for Acehnese independence or to separate from Indonesia", said SIRA presidium chair Muhammad Nazar.

According to Nazar, SIRA's activities have never disrupted political stability, security or the peace process in Aceh. "We will not disrupt political stability or security. We support what is being done by the Indonesian government and GAM", he said.

With regard to the word referendum in the name SIRA, according to the graduate of the Ar-Raniry State Institute of Islamic Studies faculty of culture, the term has quite a broad meaning. Moreover, there is not one article in the Indonesian constitution that prohibits a referendum. "For example, we could hold a referendum to change the Aceh Bill and so forth", he added. [dzie]

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Antigraft body monitoring Aceh

Jakarta Post - June 22, 2006

Jakarta — The Corruption Eradication Commission has set up a monitoring mission of reconstruction projects currently underway in the tsunami-hit Aceh and parts of North Sumatra.

KPK head Taufiequrrahman Ruki said the team would oversee a multimillion dollar project carried out by the Aceh Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (BRR).

"Commissioners from KPK will take turns to head our mission in Aceh. In the first stage, we have dispatched our commissioner Amin Sunaryadi as head of the oversight team," Taufiequrrahman told lawmakers of the House of Representatives Commission III on law and legislation.

Aside from its law enforcement role, the KPK is required to work to prevent corruption.

Illegal organisations in Aceh must be disbanded

Aceh Kita - June 21, 2006

Adi W, Banda Aceh — Indonesia's senior representative on the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM), Major General Bambang Darmono, has confirmed that there are no longer any illegal groups in Aceh. If there still are, then these groups must be disbanded immediately.

"Meaning, every organisation must have a permit that is in accordance with the law", Darmono told journalists at the offices of the Acehnese governor on Wednesday June 21.

The disbanding of such groups is in line with Ministry of Political, Legal and Security Affairs Decree Number R-13 dated 18, 2006, which provides a guarantee that there are no longer any illegal organisations in Aceh.

Darmono, the former TNI (Indonesian military) operational commander for Lhokseumawe, said that based on the decree that came into force on June 15 this year, it is not just illegal organisations in Aceh that will be disbanded, but throughout Indonesia, because many social organisations are still illegal in nature.

Darmono explained that the decree represents a verification and affirmation to address the doubts of those who say there are still many illegal groups post the conflict in Aceh. Moreover, the Memorandum of Understanding that was signed in Helsinki on August 15 last year requires that the Indonesian government disband all illegal organisations that exist in Aceh.

The illegal organisations meant by this said Darmono, are those that do not have a proper permit. He gave as an example the Aceh Referendum Information Center (SIRA). "As far as I know at the moment, SIRA does not exist any more, it stopped [functioning] after it was reprimanded by the AMM", he said.

SIRA spokesperson Dawam Gayo has refuted Darmono's

statement. According to Gayo, SIRA is not an illegal organisation as claimed by the Indonesian government, because it was established legally at the Serantau Aceh Student and Youth Congress.

"Moreover, the congress was opened by Aceh governor Syamsuddin Mahmud and the deputy speaker of the Aceh DPRD [Regional House of Representatives] from the ABRI [armed forces] Fraction, Colonel Yasril Hedradjat. Since its formation, SIRA has also been active in struggling for the creation of peace in Aceh, because SIRA does not wish violence against Aceh", said Gayo in a press release sent to Aceh Kita. "With regard to the name SIRA, there is also no need for concern although it contains the word referendum", he said.

It is not just SIRA that is being called on to disband, but all fronts formed to quash the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). Darmono said meanwhile, that the Defenders of the Fatherland (Peta) is not an organisation but only a group formed to counter those who carried out resistance during the period of conflict.

Peta is an organisation that was created post the conflict and is an umbrella organisation for various resistance fronts against GAM. A number of fronts were formed during the period that the Indonesian government declared a state of martial law and civilian emergency (May 19, 2003-April 2005) in Aceh. These include the Front for the Struggle Against GAM (FPSG), People's Fortress Against GAM Separatists (Berantas), Red White United People's Resistance (PPRMP) and a number of other groups.

There is no definitive data however on the number of illegal organisations in Aceh. Darmono noted that illegal organisations that are still active would be sanctioned. "If [they are] still operating, then there will be legal sanctions. And that is a matter for security forces", he said.

Darmono also explained that the disbanding of these illegal organisations has no relationship with the dispute within the Aceh Reintegration Agency (BRA). GAM recently resigned from the BRA because there were members of Peta in the organisation led by the rector of the Ar-Raniry State Institute of Islamic Studies, Professor

Yusni Sabi. In addition to GAM, non-government organisations have also withdrawn three of their personnel from the BRA. [dzie]

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Aceh rights violators from TNI to be tried in military court

Detik.com - June 22, 2006

Ahmad Dani, Jakarta — Common crimes committed by members of the TNI (Indonesian military) in Aceh must be tried in civilian courts. Unfortunately, the Draft Law on Aceh Government (RUU-PA) in fact seeking the opposite. Common crimes by members of the TNI will still be processed in military courts.

This was conveyed by the ad interim director of the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), Patra Zen, during a press conference at his office on Jl. Borobudur in Jakarta on Tuesday June 22.

According to Zen, indications that general crimes by military personnel will be tried in a military court can be seen from Article 154 of the draft law. Within this article it states that crimes committed by TNI members in Aceh shall be tried in accordance with prevailing laws.

"There in explicit terms it is clear that they will be directed to military courts. If [the crime] is desertion it doesn't matter, but these are common crimes", said Zen.

Zen believes that this is an example of the inconsistencies by the members of the House of Representatives (DPR) in the deliberations on military courts. According to the Draft Law on the Military, they have rejected using the military courts to try military officers who commit common crimes. But in the case of the RUU-PA, the DPR members appear to be staying silent.

"It appears there are political interests. We are asking the RUU-PA Special Committee at the DPR to explicitly say that all common crimes committed by

TNI personnel must be examined and tried in civil courts", said Zen.

Aside from military courts, there are other suspicious things in the draft law. One of these is the whitewashing of past gross human rights crimes such as during the period Aceh was declared a military operational zone [between 1989 to 1998]. "Many things in the RUU-PA also go against the constitution and other laws", said Zen.(djo)

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Acehnese people question oil & gas rights

Tempo Interactive - June 21, 2006

Oktamandjaya Wiguna, Jakarta — Elements of the Acehnese people, including the Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) and the Aceh Traditions Council (MAA) met with the Aceh Government Draft Bill (RUU PA) formulation team at the Hotel Santika, Jakarta, yesterday (20/6).

"All DPR factions indicated their commitment to give entirely what was best for Aceh, but instead the government didn't," Raihan Iskandar, NAD DPRD Deputy Chairman, told Tempo after the meeting.

The government's commitment is doubted, he said, because there are some clauses that state the management by regional government must still follow the norms and standards set by the central government.

The government's continuing interference, said Bahrum M. Rasyid, Head of the United Development Party (PPP) NAD DPRD faction, would hinder the Aceh government from performing its duties.

He cited the Aceh Regional Budget that cannot be implemented because it contradicts the Home Affairs Ministerial Decree on Aceh regional finance evaluation.

Badrul Zaman, Head of the MAA, said that he believed the government's attitude of seemingly not wanting to hand over full authority is a form

of its distrust for Aceh due to the experience of the past. According to him, this attitude will instead cause negative effects.

Rehashed bill gives Aceh greater power

Jakarta Post - June 16, 2006

M. Taufiqurrahman, Jakarta — Prospects of a lasting peace in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam appear stronger after the House of Representatives and the government accommodated long-standing demands of locals in the nearly finalized Aceh governance bill.

Following more than six months of intense deliberations, the working committee set up by the House to finalize the bill accorded Aceh greater autonomy in managing its own affairs, including administering its abundant natural resources.

Among the stipulations is that the provincial government has the right to manage the exploration of oil and gas in the province.

"All political factions in the House have agreed on this provision because they realize that oil and gas in Aceh are almost depleted and the Acehnese have the right to manage it," Ahmad Farhan Hamid of the National Mandate Party (PAN) said Thursday at a press briefing organized by the Partnership for Governance Reform.

He is the leader of Acehnese lawmakers who took part in the deliberation of the bill.

The working committee had finished the discussion of 98 percent of the bill late Wednesday, leaving only insubstantial matters to be completed.

According to the latest draft of the bill, the Acehnese also will be given the right to manage seaports and airports.

Acehnese have long harbored resentment toward the central government, which they perceive as merely exploiting their natural resources for its own gain.

The working committee and the government also agreed on the allocation of a special autonomy fund amounting to 2 percent of the general allocation fund (DAU) for a 20-year-period.

"We had to haggle with Communication and Information Minister Sofyan Djalil as the representative of the government before agreeing on the figure. The government always wanted a lesser amount of funds for a shorter period," Farhan said.

Other crucial provisions agreed to by the working committee are the implementation of sharia in Aceh, the setting up of a rights tribunal and truth and reconciliation commission, the powerful standing of sharia-derived ordinance (qanun) as well as permitting independent candidates and local political parties to contest local elections.

None of the factions in the House, including the nationalist-leaning Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle and Christian-based the Prosperous Peace Party, opposed the implementation of sharia in the province.

It also was agreed that the rights tribunal and truth and reconciliation commission would be set up according to the existing law, a compromise after heated debate about applying a retroactive principle.

Representatives from the Aceh local council, the institution that campaigned for a greater autonomy, said the bill now accommodated the demands of most Acehnese.

"Ninety percent of our aspirations, mainly on the natural resources issue, have been accommodated in the final draft and that's a good sign for peace, because every rebellion in Aceh stemmed from the unequal distribution of resources," Acehese councillor Adriman Kemat said.

Fellow councillor Azhary Basar, however, advised the government to consult the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) before passing the bill into law. "Most GAM members still think that politicians have watered down the Helsinki peace accord," Azhary said.

Key provisions in latest draft

- Management of the exploration of oil and gas under the provincial government
- Special autonomy fund of 2 percent for a 20-year period starting in 2007
- Rights tribunal and truth and reconciliation commission will be set up according to the existing laws
- Independent candidates will be allowed to contest local elections
- Local political parties can be formed with 30 percent of subscription from women Suggestions from working committee
- The provincial government has full control of land administration
- The provincial government has full control over Islamic schools previously under the Religious Affairs Ministry.

WEST PAPUA

Papuan asylum seekers regret coming to Australia

Detik.com - June 20, 2006

Nurfajri Budi Nugroho, Jakarta — The 42 Papuan asylum seekers who obtained temporary visas in Australia are now biting their finger nails. Their dream of finding work in the Nation of the Kangaroo has run aground (sic).

"The 42 Papuans appear not to want the same thing. Only one or two are 'true believers' and in fact they are now regretting [coming to Australia]", said House of Representative (DPR) Commission I member AS Hikam in Jakarta on Tuesday June 20. "They were tricked as if after their arrival in Australia they would be given jobs", added Hikam.

Nevertheless, Hikam who is also the head of the Commission I Delegation Team to Australia declined to elaborate on the source of the report he received. "There is a report that mentions it", he exclaimed emotionally.

Hikam conceded that his delegation did not meet

directly with the 42 Papuans. "The lawyer of the 42 Papuans appears to be afraid that the DPR's Commission I would intimidate them and so objected to us meeting with them", explained the National Awakening Party politician.

Hikam has asked the Indonesian Consulate General in Australia to provide humanitarian assistance to the 42 Papuans because their situation is of concern and not as they had hoped for.

Howard

Hikam also took the opportunity to express his hope that President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Australian Prime Minister John Howard would hold comprehensive discussions on the relationship between the two countries.

"Don't just pick up on certain issues. Don't just take one dimension for discussion such as the question of [Abu Bakar] Bashir", said Hikam. (aan)

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Papuans give legislation marching orders

The Australian - June 19, 2006

Richard Kerbaj — Hundreds of protesters, including four Papuan refugees, yesterday rallied against the Howard Government's proposed migration bill that would lock asylum-seekers in offshore detention centres.

The four refugees, who joined more than 300 protesters outside the Melbourne Museum, were among the 42 Papuans who fled to Australia from Indonesia by boat in January and were eventually granted temporary protection visas by the Immigration Department.

Angry protesters attacked the bill and called for Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone to be "locked up". Speaking through a translator, the four refugees told The Australian they opposed the bill and welcomed the protest.

Immigration lawyer David Manne, who represents the

Papuans, told the crowd that the Migration Amendment Bill would violate Australia's legal international obligations.

"These amendments are far more radical than anything that we've seen before," he later told The Australian. "Australia's very commitment to the protection of vulnerable people in need is at stake."

The Migration Amendments Bill was introduced after Indonesia reacted angrily to the decision to grant protection visas to the Papuans in March. The bill proposes all asylum-seekers arriving by boat be processed in offshore centres such as Nauru. Presently, asylum-seekers who make it to Australia are processed in mainland detention centres.

The proposed laws have sparked division in the federal Government, with Liberal backbencher Judi Moylan reserving her right to vote against the bill or abstain during a Coalition partyroom meeting.

Democrats leader senator Lyn Allison told protesters the bill would bring disgrace and shame to Australian citizens. She said the bill would allow the Government to "completely avoid any obligation to even consider taking people who are refugees who arrive here".

Senator Allison said some refugees were suffering from health problems such as mental illnesses as a result of their detainment. "Mental illness is so common for people being held in year after year," she said.

The Australian Democrats leader praised the protesters for opposing the proposed laws, saying: "The cruel treatment of people who seek asylum in this country brings shame upon us all."

An inquiry into the bill by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee last week revealed the bill's "broad incompatibility with the rule of law" and its potential to breach Australia's obligations under international law if it were to be pushed through.

Military to stay at Freeport

Jakarta Post - June 19, 2006

Tb. Arie Rukmantara, Jakarta — The Indonesian Military (TNI) says it will continue guarding PT Freeport Indonesia in the restive province of Papua, despite accusations of human rights abuses against local people.

Protecting the American gold and copper mine was listed as part of the military's duties in the 2004 presidential decree on national vital objects, said Lt. Col. Inf. Siburian, deputy intelligence assistant at the Trikora military command overseeing Papua.

"We have to protect this object because it is not only a state asset but it also involves foreign interests," he told a discussion here Friday, attended by police officers as well as Freeport and Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry officials.

Siburian warned that should security be harmed at Freeport, the US government would almost certainly send security forces to intervene.

Freeport is a subsidiary of the New Orleans-based mining giant Freeport McMoran Copper and Gold Inc., which is listed on the New York Stock Exchange. The Indonesian government owns less than 10 percent of the company.

"If we fail to protect it, don't blame us if foreign forces come into the company's area," Siburian said, citing the 2002 shooting near the mine that killed two American teachers. FBI agents were then sent in to help find the killers.

In January this year the FBI and Papua Police arrested 12 rebels over the incident, including Anthonius Wamang who had been indicted for the murder in an in absentia trial by a US grand jury in 2004.

Siburian said TNI has prepared 12 contingency plans to counter possible security threats to

Freeport, including terrorism and separatism.

"We understand that terrorists often target American interests. Freeport is prone to terrorist attacks," said Siburian, who is a former military district commander in Mimika, home to the Grasberg mine.

Papua Police deputy chief Brig. Gen. Max Donald Aer said his office and TNI would stay inside the Freeport compound until after the company was able to boost the capacity of its internal security guards.

"Gradually we'll leave the internal security role to the company and will only secure areas outside its concessions," he said.

Max said the police would launch Amole (peace) Operation I to secure the company's assets and promote the company's internal security, but declined to discuss the details of the six-month operation.

Currently some 700 military soldiers are protecting Freeport and an additional 350 troops will be deployed there to back up the Amole operation, which will involve 1,098 security personnel, including 630 National Police and 118 from the Papua police office.

Mudakir, an advisor to the energy and mineral resources minister, said Freeport was one of 270 vital national objects listed by his office.

"However, the company is the only vital national object that has not yet been able to manage its internal security independently," he said.

Freeport security manager Mangasa R. Saragih, a retired one-star Army general, denied reports the company gave cash payments to soldiers and police deployed to the mine. The troops only received the necessary equipment and vehicles to carry out their patrol duties, he said.

Freeport recently drew strong criticism after the New York Times revealed that from 1998 to 2004 the company paid military and police nearly \$20 million in security money, which activists considered bribes.

Critics say Freeport badly needs the police and

TNI to prevent possible attacks from local Papuans who reject its presence, while the police and TNI personnel need the company to provide extra income, both for their cash-strapped organizations and themselves individually.

Human rights watchdog Elsham Papua director Aloysius Renwarin and local tribal leaders have opposed the military presence at Freeport and urged for its withdrawal.

"The military presence will only add to its long human rights violation record. What we need now is to find a way to empower local residents living near Freeport areas to willingly safeguard the company's facilities," Aloysius said.

PORNOGRAPHY & MORALITY

Indonesian dancer, clerics go toe-to-toe

Asia Times - June 21, 2006

Duncan Graham, Gembol (East Java) — Westerners who have seen concerts or videos featuring Indonesia's top entertainer Inul Daratista wonder what the fuss is all about. The archipelago's No 1 dangdut singer and dancer performs fully dressed — and stays that way.

Sure, her pants test Lycra's stretch ratings and she does a rather basic ferret-in-a-sack wiggle that leaves lots to the imagination. By Western standards of risque, however, it's a bit of a bum show.

But not in Indonesia, where the nation's moral guardians are fighting to purge the land of so-called Western influences. Ironically, perhaps, dangdut has no Hollywood antecedents; it's a mix of thumping, jangling Indian, Malay and Arab music that sounds like a cacophony to many outsiders.

It's Inul's bottom-rotating ngebor (boring, as in drilling) dance style that the country's Muslim clerics say they find lewd and a threat to national morals. Infuriated by her growing popularity, success and independence, they are now pushing for new legislation outlawing a range of codes and behaviors, which, if implemented, would throw a cold blanket on her act.

Most of the proposed legal provisions concern the way women dress and behave. Liberals see the bill as a bid to impose strict Islamic sharia law on the nation, where an estimated 90% of the 240 million population consider themselves Muslim.

These are just the bubbles on the surface; below is a seething cauldron of gender politics, state control of the arts, and the future shape of Indonesia's infant democracy. And Inul's gyrating dance is at the heart of the controversy.

Inul was an unknown from the industrial East Java town of Gempol who hit the capital Jakarta's big time in 2003 with her ngebor style. In many ways, her dancing captured the ebullient mood of a country boldly experimenting with long-repressed freedoms.

During president Suharto's 32-year dictatorship, dangdut was fully appropriated and manipulated by the government. The traditional music's raunchy lyrics and movements were cleaned up and it was toned down to promote state-determined values.

Singer and presidential favorite Rhoma Irama became the state-appointed king of dangdut, then reigning on the government-run television stations. In 1998, Suharto fell, media restrictions were lifted, private TV stations opened, and artists started freely expressing themselves for the first time in decades.

Including Inul — and to Rhoma's displeasure. He banned her from using his songs and condemned her for corrupting dangdut. In fact, Inul had really returned dangdut back to its village roots, asserting its home-grown robustness, expressing the hopes and fears of the country's poor and downtrodden. Simply put, dangdut is the music of the poor and Inul is their gutsy gal.

Now she faces a much bigger threat from the country's increasingly vocal and politically powerful Islamic fundamentalist groups. Although the hardline Indonesian Ulemas' Council listed her performances under an Islamic fatwa against pornography, the controversy just helped to draw bigger crowds.

In the 2004 general election, she became the warm-up act most wanted for political rallies. A

record 3 million copies of her pirated video were reported to have been sold. Inul lookalikes popped up everywhere.

Pornographic interpretations

Fast-forward to the present. The proposed bill against pornography and “pornographic acts” — which includes the exposure of female flesh — is clearly directed at the likes of Inul and her multiplying imitators.

Political commentators claim that the raging debate has exposed a national fault line — pitching the insular, poorly educated, easily led majority in the countryside versus the more urbane, better-schooled city folk with liberal pretensions — that will be hard to bridge. The latter are the noisier group — but they don’t have the numbers, so the controversial bill may yet become law.

The president, former military general Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, has given some comfort to the bill’s supporters by throwing out of the state palace a dancer who planned to expose her midriff during a performance. He has also publicly condemned the public display of female navels.

The bill’s backers have branded opponents broadly as moral corruptors. Such ethnic groups as the Balinese, whose bare-shouldered traditional dress would be banned under the planned legislation, have joined Jakarta entertainers in protest rallies where Inul has been prominent. Her group says there are already plenty of laws on the statutes to protect society and that the anti-pornography law is unnecessary for a democratic society.

For speaking out on the issue, though, Inul has been ordered out of Jakarta by the Betawi Brotherhood — a fundamentalist group that claims to act on behalf of the city’s traditional folk. One of Inul’s karaoke lounges has already been attacked by a mob from the Islamic Defenders’ Front — another band of thugs in Muslim garb — and she has been publicly condemned by various other hardliners.

During Suharto’s rule demonstrations were tightly controlled and protests rapidly suppressed —

often brutally. Under democracy, street rallies and random acts of violence have become commonplace — often under the passive gaze of police officials. Recently, Yodhoyono indicated that he would move against violent religious groups, but so far there have been no significant round-ups or arrests.

That has Inul's supporters on edge that she could become a high-profile target for extremists. "I don't intend to leave Jakarta and I'm not afraid of the Betawi," Inul said from her home in East Java. "I'm afraid of the way that the government is handling the problem. I'm frightened about what's happening to Indonesia."

Unlike many other successful celebrities who flee their origins for an exclusive address, Inul has remained loyal to her roots. Although she employs security guards in Jakarta, her home in Gempol relies on neighborhood support for protection, she said.

So far, the personal attacks seem to have saddened the unpretentious 29-year-old rather than suppressing her fighting spirit. Her dancing career started when she was 12, and she's often described by her supporters as tough, self-assured and determined. And, significantly, she's a devoted Muslim, albeit of the moderate kind.

"I'm a Muslim, serious about my faith. I regret the things some Muslim clerics are saying," Inul said in an interview. "Why are they bothering with anti-pornography? Why are they always talking about women? The priorities in this country should be getting people jobs and a better education."

Inul said she employed more than 750 staff at her seven karaoke lounges. She has also been approached by a number of political parties to consider a career in politics, but so far she has declined all of the offers. "It's too corrupt," she said.

Through her spirited fight against the anti-pornography bill, she has fast emerged as one of Indonesia's most visible women's rights activists. "I want to lift the status of women. I want them to be brave enough to take risks." More than words, it's an example by which the vibrant dancer lives.

[Australian journalist Duncan Graham
(www.indonesianow.blogspot.com) lives in Surabaya,
East Java.]

FBR chief named a suspect for defaming women protesters

Jakarta Post - June 17, 2006

Jakarta — Betawi Brotherhood Forum (FBR) chairman Fadloli El Muhir was charged Friday with defaming women protesters, with police declaring the move showed their intent to curb intimidation by mass organizations.

Jakarta Police chief Insp. Gen. Firman Gani said Fadloli was charged as a suspect in violating Criminal Code articles on defamation and the incitement of hatred, with the case to be turned over to the Jakarta Prosecutor's Office within a month. If found guilty, he could receive a maximum four-year prison term.

Fadloli has not been detained because, Firman said, it was only required for suspects in cases with sentences of five years or more.

He said the police would rein in groups deemed to cause terror and public disorder, following criticism law enforcers have failed to act against alleged intimidation. "Law enforcement is the answer to handle those organizations," he said.

A day earlier, detectives questioned Fadloli for 12 hours about remarks he made of women who took part in an April 22 protest against the pornography bill, which is currently under deliberation in the House of Representatives.

In a live current affairs program on Metro TV on May 1, Fadloli described the protesters as "evil, wretched and immoral". Former first lady Sinta Nuriyah Wahid and playwright Ratna Sarumpaet, who took part in the rally, reacted to the comments by separately reporting Fadloli to city police on June 1 and June 6.

Fadloli insisted that his remarks were not

directed at any particular individual and that he had commented in his capacity as a Muslim cleric.

To be fair, Firman said the police also would follow up on Fadloli's complaint, filed on May 23, against Sinta Nuriyah for calling FBR an intolerant and anarchistic group.

Fadloli could not be reached for comment, but his lawyer Suhana Natawilwana told The Jakarta Post on Thursday night that his client was ready to face the charges. "It's just part of the legal process. It doesn't mean he's guilty," Suhana said.

Police will call several women activists, including entertainer Rieke Diah Pitaloka and Jurnal Perempuan (women's journal) chief editor Gadis Arivia, and the moderator of the Metro TV talk show Today's Dialog Meutia Hafidz, as witnesses in the case.

Government told to act fast against sharia laws

Jakarta Post - June 16, 2006

Jakarta — Legal experts rebuked the central government Thursday for being hesitant to immediately revoke sharia-derived bylaws, which they said clearly flouted higher laws and could cause national disintegration.

They urged officials to act against the bylaws, which they said contravened the Constitution and other higher laws as well as the state ideology of Pancasila that recognizes pluralism and secularism.

"Local governments cannot regulate the religious affairs of their residents. Only the central government has the authority to do so," autonomy law expert Ryaas Rasyid said.

Article 3 of the 2004 Regional Administration Law gives the central government the right to regulate issues of international policy, defense, judicial, monetary and fiscal matters and religious affairs.

"All such sharia-derived bylaws can be revoked through a presidential decree," said the regional

autonomy minister during the Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid administration who was involved in drawing up the autonomy law.

Some consider the government's reluctance to stem from fears of a backlash from hard-line religious groups and political opportunists.

Legal expert Denny Indrayana also urged the central government to take immediate action against the ordinances for the sake of national unity. He regretted what he termed President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's reticence in the decision-making process. "SBY always hesitates to make any decision."

Lack of coordination on the part of political parties also worsened the problem, he said. "This is very strange because members of political parties at local legislative councils have supported the bylaws while those in the House of Representatives were opposed."

Golkar Party members in the House and other legislators from nationalist parties have issued a petition for the President to scrap the sharia ordinances because of the potential to splinter multiethnic, religiously pluralistic Indonesia. In contrast, Golkar councillors in several regions, including Tangerang in Banten province, have supported the bylaws.

The religiously motivated ordinances, many of which focus on prostitution and the consumption of alcohol, are considered to be particularly prone to misuse against the rights of women.

Denny said there was no reason for the central government to delay revoking the bylaws. "Based on Law No. 32/2004, the government can make a decision 60 days after local administrations give bylaws for review," he said.

The national unity and politics director-general at the Home Affairs Ministry, Sudarsono Hardjosoekarto, said his office was still looking into whether the sharia-based ordinances were in line with the 2004 autonomy law. "There are several procedures that we have to follow."

Sudarsono said the ministry's first step would be to ask governors, mayors and regents to identify

all bylaws to determine if they violated human rights, Pancasila, the Constitution and other higher laws. "Then, the local administrations can review their own bylaws and afterward we will evaluate the ordinances whether they have violated the higher laws or not," he added.

He said the ministry was authorized to revoke bylaws that have been issued.

HUMAN RIGHTS/LAW

Government 'undermining' community land rights

Jakarta Post - June 23, 2006

Tb. Arie Rukmantara, Ubud (Bali) — Sidelining customary laws and undermining tribal wisdom in managing Indonesia's rich natural resources is certainly not what the 1945 Constitution espouses, therefore reinterpretation of the supreme law is badly needed to promote prosperity among Indonesians, environmental law and management experts say.

An expert from the Center for International Environmental Law, Owen Lynch, says the content of the 1945 Constitution has been consistently misinterpreted by various governments that administered Indonesia to state their claims to exploit the country's natural resources on behalf of national interests.

To make matters worse, he says, the present government has not been able to execute Article 18 of the Constitution that acknowledges traditional rights and opens the door for indigenous people to participate in the management of natural wealth.

"The recognition of traditional rights to natural resources should be initiated by scraping regulations that contradict the Constitution," he said in a statement released by the organizer of the 11th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of Common Property in Ubud, Bali, on Wednesday.

The five-day conference was attended by over 500 scientists, NGO activists and policy-makers, who discussed the issue of devolution of natural resources.

Owen said the government could demonstrate its willingness to recognize traditional rights by revoking a 2005 presidential decree, which regulates that the state has the right to take over private property for the sake of public interests. Indonesia has the richest natural resources in Southeast Asia, but is falling behind Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam in terms of prosperity and human development. Critics say the country, which has Asia's largest forests area and is rich in mineral, oil and gas reserves, has failed to manage its wealth for the prosperity of its people.

Experts also fear that the government will privatize the management its rich natural resources by issuing controversial laws, such as the 2004 Water Resource Law, the 1999 Forestry Law, the 2001 Oil and Gas Law as well as the bill on energy and mineral resources, all of which were passed for the sake of luring foreign investors.

Director of the Bogor Institute of Agriculture's Center for Regional Systems Analysis Planning and Development, Ernan Rustiadi, said the government's monopoly over the right to manage common property, a property collectively managed by traditional groups, such as land, contradicted the 1960 Agrarian Law that recognized land ownership based on customary law.

"The government seems to think that everything that is not privately owned belongs to the state. On the contrary, much of the land is owned by traditional groups," Ernan, said the chair of the conference.

"Unfortunately, the government feels they're referring to Article 33 of the Constitution that stipulates that 'Land, water and natural wealth contained in them is controlled by the state'", he continued, adding that the government had failed to use its authority to help its citizens prosper.

"That contradicts the article's last sentence, which enjoins the government to exploit natural resources for the well-being of its citizens," he said.

Human rights violation cases in East Java unsolved

Jakarta Post - June 22, 2006

Wahyoe Boediwardhana, Malang — The Human Rights Center of Surabaya's Airlangga University revealed Wednesday that seven cases of gross human rights violations in East Java remain unsettled to date through either the judicial system or the human rights tribunal.

Rafael Lami Heru Haryoso of the center said in Malang that the seven included the fate former political detainees of the now-defunct Indonesian Communist Party (PKI); the killing of labor protester Marsinah in Sidoarjo; the shooting of farmers in Blitar, Banyuwangi and Jember; the killing of Muslim preachers in Banyuwangi and land acquisition in Nipah, Madura.

Rafael said that efforts to conclusively settle the cases, however, were hindered mainly by the difficulties in proving them or in obtaining testimonies from those implicated in the cases. It was worsened by the fact that one of the defendants had already died and others were beyond the reach of the law, he said.

Moreover, the current government could not be described as totally independent or having no connection with the previous administrations, he said.

Rafael cited as an example the shooting of students on Semanggi cloverleaf in Jakarta, which could not be settled through the existing legal system. Even the House of Representatives issued its own resolution on it, but it remains unresolved.

The only avenue remaining to reach a decision would be through the truth and reconciliation commission, even though the initiative would have to come from the government itself.

"Through the commission all who are implicated (in the above-mentioned cases) are obliged to admit their misdoings before they are exonerated through

reconciliation efforts," he said.

Rafael said that it was time now to set up a human rights tribunal in East Java to handle any new human rights violations.

"Who can guarantee there will be no more human rights violations in the future. After the dropping of the nuclear bomb, the world wars, there have still been other massacres," Rafael said.

Rafael admitted he did not know the reasons behind delays in the establishment of human rights tribunals for rights violation cases throughout Indonesia, or the truth and reconciliation commission.

In line with a 2001 presidential instruction a special human rights court should have been set up under the jurisdiction of each district court in Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan and Makassar, he said.

Meanwhile, Ummu Hilmi, a lecturer at the School of Law of Malang's Brawijaya University, asserted that difficulties in settling rights violation cases in East Java were caused by the public's limited knowledge about human rights.

"That includes the law enforcers and government apparatuses. Therefore, it is very difficult to apply it in the field," Ummu Hilmi said.

Ummu Hilmi said that the victims of human rights violations would just demand that their civil rights be restored as they realized it would be impossible to settle the cases through what may become arduous and time-consuming human rights trials.

New Criminal Code to heat up House

Jakarta Post - June 16, 2006

Tony Hotland, Jakarta — Plans to soften the capital punishment law and old ordinances on sedition and to replace the one-year jail term with community service are among the most contentious issues in a bill to revise the

outdated Criminal Code.

The government said Thursday it was planning another round of discussions with experts to complete the draft code before presenting it to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono for his approval.

The bill was discussed Thursday in a Cabinet meeting led by Yudhoyono and is scheduled to be submitted to the House of Representatives in July for deliberation.

In the bill, the government offers several new approaches to enforcing the law. These accommodate punishments for crimes specified in the many international conventions Indonesia has ratified since the existing Criminal Code was first enforced in 1918.

Justice and Human Rights Minister Hamid Awaluddin said the bill, which has taken around 25 years to complete, touched on new issues not contained in the existing law, such as contempt of court, torture, domestic violence, money laundering, blasphemy, war crimes, pornography, gross human rights violations, corporate crime, cyber crime and human trafficking.

"In the draft law, we have decided to abolish the one-year jail term and replace it with an alternative sentence in the form of imposing a fine and community service," he said.

The minister said 20 percent of the total inmates in prisons nationwide were serving one year or less in prison, overcrowding jails.

The government has listened to arguments that said the one-year jail term did nothing to rehabilitate small-time criminals but ended up making them worse offenders after release. It favors a supervised community service program along with increased fines, as alternatives.

National Resilience Institute governor Muladi, a legal expert who heads the bill's drafting team, said the issue of whether to terminate capital punishment was heavily debated in the Cabinet meeting.

"There are many concerns, and pros and cons,

particularly if seen from the angles of religion and culture. So we have decided to keep the article on capital punishment, but we also put in articles on how the sentence could be reduced to life imprisonment," he said.

Muladi said death sentences would only be commuted in specific circumstances. Factors considered would include the level of involvement of suspects in crimes and the remorse and guilt they showed after capture.

The government would also narrow the scope of old laws on sedition used by previous governments stifle freedom of expression.

"For this, we have narrowed the definition of the crimes of inciting hatred and causing insult (to the government) to acts that cause public disorder. We hope this will not be interpreted to mean people can be easily charged for taking part in protests against the government," Muladi said.

On issues of public decency and pornography, he said the bill contained "few limitations" to ensure the state did not interfere in the personal lives of citizens. "We have limited the issue of adultery. This, once again, may cause lengthy debate since we have had to take into account the perspectives of public privacy, religion and lifestyle," Muladi said.

The bill contained 741 articles and its deliberations would be expected to take two years, he said.

LABOUR ISSUES

Meeting on labor dispute postponed

Jakarta Post - June 23, 2006

Jakarta — The Indonesian Employers Association (Apindo) has decided to postpone a national bipartite meeting with the country's labor unions supposedly due in June to an unspecified future date.

Apindo secretary-general Djimanto said Thursday said that the association made the decision Wednesday because up to now representatives of

labor unions did not have a united front.

He said that Apindo had not decided when it would hold the meeting. However, he added that Apindo would be ready whenever the labor unions had come to an agreement. "The effort should come from the labor unions themselves," Djimanto said.

In Indonesia there are thousands of labor unions under about 89 federations. These groups, before meeting with representatives from the business sector, have to decide on what the workers want and who will represent them in the meeting.

Head of the National Labor Defenders Front, Domingus Oktavianus, said that due to the large number of federations in Indonesia it was a difficult task to have a common voice in a short period of time. "We will need at least three more months," he said.

The national bipartite meeting plan was initiated in May this year after representatives of the business sector and labor unions agreed to seek the best ways to improve the business climate.

The two were at loggerheads after May labor rallies rejecting the planned revisions of the 2003 Labor Law turned violent and paralyzed businesses. The workers were frustrated over the planned revision of the 2003 Labor Law, which could give a stronger legal base for employers to only hire contract workers, and limit severance and service payments to dismissed workers with monthly salaries of Rp 1.1 million (US\$100) or less.

Apindo has said that it is easing up pressure to revise the 2003 Labor Law, saying that there are other more urgent ways to improve the business climate.

Association chairman Sofyan Wanandi had previously said that the association's priority at the moment was improving laws that govern taxation, customs and investment.

He pointed out that the revision of the Labor Law was indeed important to improve the investment climate. However, it was not the sole factor.

Plywood workers on strike in Tangerang

Jakarta Post - June 23, 2006

Tangerang — Some 500 workers of plywood producer PT Panah Forest Perkasa at Cikupa Mas Industrial Plant continued their strike Wednesday, bringing production to a halt.

The work stoppage, which started Monday morning, is to demand the company — which is located in Cikupa district, Tangerang regency — improve conditions for workers.

"The management must pay us on time, not late as usual," strike coordinator, Hari, said, adding that other demands included minimum wage salaries and full-time jobs for contract workers.

While the company has agreed to two of the workers' demands, it has yet to agree to abolish contract work at the plant, Hari said.

"We won't return to work until the management meets all our demands." The company's officials have refused to meet journalists.

Bus, taxi drivers say they have been slighted

Jakarta Post - June 23, 2006

Adianto P. Simamora, Jakarta — It was a day like any other at the Jakarta Transportation Agency on Wednesday, with public transportation drivers arriving in droves to file complaints.

Dozens of drivers of taxis, minibuses and buses gathered in the office, demanding to be heard.

"If there is no improvement this year, many of our companies will go bankrupt. The city administration only cares about the success of the busway and has never stopped to consider its negative effects on other modes of public transportation. I don't see the administration

making any effort to accommodate drivers," said Burhanuddin, who drives a Mayasari Bakti bus.

Wednesday's meeting was facilitated by the city transportation council (DTK), which gives the city administration recommendations on transportation issues.

Burhanuddin said the busway had increased the severity of traffic jams and put many bus drivers out of work.

"By my calculations, every new busway bus on the road means 10 old buses are relegated to the depot. The administration came in very late to arrange alternative routes for the buses.

"We proposed the establishment of a route linking Jakarta and Cileungsi in Bogor... we obtained an operational permit from the Bogor administration but Jakarta has yet to issue permits," he said.

One-hundred-and-forty-two buses operate in the city's three busway corridors and about 225,000 public transportation vehicles traverse the city streets every day.

Blue Bird taxi driver Widirianto said passenger numbers had been dropping because of last year's fuel price increases and the operation of the busway system.

"We are facing extensive problems. Fuel prices have gone up, the busway is stealing our customers and there are too many taxis on the road, but the administration does nothing to help us," he said.

Drivers also harbor doubts about the administration's decision to make all public transportation vehicles run on compressed natural gas. "It is not a solution. The use of CNG is not efficient for taxis," said Blue Bird driver Kusnadi.

The drivers said that, while CNG was cheaper than diesel, a significant investment was needed to modify a vehicle to run on CNG. There is also a limited supply of CNG in the city.

There are currently 26,000 taxies in Jakarta. Some 16,000 taxies from surrounding areas like Depok, Bekasi and Tangerang operate in Jakarta every day. Seventeen stations sell CNG, but only six of them

are operational.

Transportation council member Sri Widodo, who represents taxi companies, said the council would ask the administration to clamp down on taxis illegally operating in the city.

"We will also ask the administration to impose restrictions on the logos and colors taxi companies use, so passengers aren't confused."

NGOs declare support for striking Securicor workers

Detik.com - June 16, 2006

Chazizah Gusnita, Jakarta — At least six non-government organisations (NGOs) have declared their full support for 259 PT Securicor Indonesia employees whose future's are now uncertain. This support is necessary because the employees are confronting a large foreign owned company.

This was conveyed by the chairperson of the Securicor Indonesia Trade Union, Dedi F Toisutta, at Securicor's central office on Jl. Raya Cilandak in Jakarta on Friday June 16. "We know that we are opposing a large and strong foreign company. Therefore we have requested the assistance of friends (NGOs)", said Toisutta.

A number of organisations have declared their support for the workers including the Indonesian Legal Aid and Human Rights Association (PBHI), the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), Dirgantara Indonesia, the All Indonesia Trade Union (SPSI) and a number of other trade union federations.

For five days now, the 259 Securicor employees have been occupying the Securicor offices. They are demanding that they be reemployed after one year and two months of legal uncertainty.

The case began with an international merger between Group 4 Folck and PT Securicor in Britain on July 3, 2004. Although Securicor Indonesia did not take part in the merger, the management

transferred the employees to Group 4 Folck.

This was in contravention of Law Number 13/2003 on Labour. According to regulations, if employees are transferred, they must first be dismissed and paid severance pay by the company. The company did not do this however and instead arbitrarily sacked the employees.

The employees have even undertaken legal action through the state courts, department of labour and the Supreme Court. On May 19, 2006, the Supreme Court ordered that the company must reemploy the workers or pay them severance pay.

To date however, Securicor has failed to comply with the order on the grounds that it cannot possibly reemploy the workers. Securicor has been working with other partners but because of a recent strike by its employees, a number of these decided not to work with the company any more because they were suffering financial losses.

The 259 employees plan to occupy the office for the next three weeks until there are new negotiations with the management in accordance with their demands. (umi)

[Translated by James Balowski.]

WAR ON TERROR

Indonesia's fizzling terrorist threat

Asia Times - June 22, 2006

Bill Guerin, Jakarta — Within hours of his release from prison, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir wasted no time reiterating his jihadi mission. The firebrand Islamic cleric, identified by the United States and Australia as one of Southeast Asia's most dangerous terrorists, urged Indonesian Muslims to "unite behind the Islamic goal and strengthen the Islamic brotherhood and work to establish sharia" (Islamic law).

Ba'asyir, 68, widely recognized as the spiritual head of the militant Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) organization, was convicted last year on conspiracy charges related to his role in the 2002 Bali bombing that killed more than 200 people. His

early release after serving 25 and a half months was criticized by US and Australian officials for being much too lenient, and some have warned it could re-energize the JI network he allegedly heads.

But how much of a threat does JI really pose nowadays? Indonesia's US-trained and -equipped elite police counter-terrorism team, known locally as Detachment 88, has recently captured or killed more than 200 suspected JI-linked militants. The legal status of most of the detainees is unclear, though officials say they are being held under 2003 anti-terrorism legislation that allows for detention without trial.

Indonesian police have recently made some high-profile hits. They ran down Malaysian geophysicist Azahari Bin Husin, JI's chief bomb maker, who allegedly designed the explosives for the 2002 Bali bombing, the Marriott Hotel bombing of 2003, and the 2004 bomb attack on the Australian Embassy in Jakarta. He blew himself up before security officials could nab him, though they did uncover evidence of plans for future bomb attacks. Indonesian authorities say that nearly all of the militant suspects in their custody have cited Ba'asyir as their inspiration. (Ba'asyir, for his part, has consistently denied that JI exists.)

Ba'asyir's release could give a big boost to regional jihadists, US and Australian officials warn. Speaking to a delegation of foreign creditors from the Consultative Group on Indonesia soon after the release, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said, "Our national efforts to combat terrorism are not measured by the release of Ba'asyir. We are fully committed in continuing the fight against terrorism."

Syamsir Siregar, head of the State Intelligence Agency (BIN), meanwhile, expressed his hopes after Ba'asyir's release that he will cooperate with terrorism investigators to nab militant suspects.

Australia and the US have asked Indonesia to keep Ba'asyir under 24-hour watch, but the Justice Ministry has said his release was unconditional. Kevin Rudd, Australia's federal opposition spokesman on foreign affairs and trade, said it means that there is now an "anti-Australian, anti-Western mass murderer on the loose in

Indonesia".

A US Embassy spokesman said there was cause for concern: "We were deeply disappointed that a person convicted of a sinister conspiracy was given such a short prison sentence."

Despite calls from Washington and Canberra, Jemaah Islamiyah still has not been banned in Indonesia. Yudhoyono, echoing Ba'asyir's line, says there still is not enough evidence to establish that the organization actually exists. Western terrorism experts and the Singaporean government have issued a series of in-depth research reports that chronicle JI's history, accomplished and foiled plots, and alleged members. Those reports, drawing on regional intelligence sources, say JI has a vision of carving out a new pan-Islamic state across Southeast Asia encompassing Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and parts of the Philippines and Thailand.

What's unclear is whether that literature is now out of date. Some terrorism experts believe that the recent crackdown has severely dented JI's operations and splintered its leadership. According to counter-terrorism official Syamsir, JI is now controlled by three hardline Indonesians: Zulkarnaen, the alleged commander of the militant wing; explosives expert Abu Dujana; and operations chief Zuhroni. Noordin Mohamed Top, a Malaysian accused of orchestrating a series of JI-inspired bombings in Indonesia, is still at large and allegedly takes his orders from the top three, according to Siregar.

Terrorism experts say that the 2003 arrest of JI operations chief Riduan Isamuddin, or Hambali, in Thailand was a major blow to JI's organization and operations. Hambali, who has been dubbed by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) the Osama bin Laden of Southeast Asia, is being held at an undisclosed location by US officials.

Indonesian officials point to the lack of any significant terrorist attacks over the past 18 months as evidence that JI's potency has been reduced as a result of the recent crackdown.

Pleasing the West

Indonesia's strategic significance to the United

States assumed a new and urgent dimension after the September 11, 2001, terror attacks. Southeast Asia was soon thereafter identified by Washington as its second front of the "global war on terror". US officials have since worked hand-in-hand with regional security forces, particularly in the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore, to track and apprehend suspected terrorists.

Indonesia, with its complex political dynamics and fractured internal security apparatus, was until recently viewed by the US as the weakest link in its regional counter-terrorism campaign. Washington had frequently warned of terrorist cells and planned attacks, including intelligence reports that presaged the 2002 Bali bombing.

Former US ambassador to Indonesia Ralph "Skip" Boyce had frequently chastised president Megawati Sukarnoputri's government for failing to neutralize the terrorist threat. After repeated US warnings fell on deaf ears, Washington threatened to withdraw its diplomatic presence in Jakarta apart from essential staff members.

Megawati's inaction was rooted in her concerns about a possible nationalist backlash and breakup of her fragile coalition government — members of which, notably the vice president, were sympathetic to fundamentalist Islamic causes — if she launched a crackdown on suspected Islamic militants. Moreover, a crackdown would have handed the military new powers at a time Megawati was striving to end the military's dominant role in politics.

Washington drastically changed its tune after the election of Yudhoyono in September 2004. During an official visit to Indonesia in March, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice referred to the country as a model of democratic and moderate Islam. Following up, B Lynn Pascoe, the current US ambassador to Indonesia, said, "I am struck by the dramatic changes in the US-Indonesian relationship. Our presidents have met three times during a short period for substantive discussions of bilateral and global issues."

Last year the US resumed military-to-military contacts with the Indonesian military (TNI) after nearly a decade's suspension because of human-rights issues, including the TNI's involvement in

the devastation of East Timor in 1999. More recently, Washington has also dangled the prospect of a bilateral free-trade agreement with Jakarta, similar to the pacts it has signed or is negotiating with regional strategic allies in Singapore, Australia and Thailand.

Washington has supported Yudhoyono's quiet, yet tough, tack. The US Embassy in Jakarta quietly vets potential members of the Detachment 88 counter-terrorism unit it supports for their individual human-rights records. And Yudhoyono's government's gradual arrest of more than 200 suspected militants has so far failed to generate major media or human-rights groups' attention.

Instead, counter-terrorism officials have focused on the few high-profile catches. The key actors responsible for the Bali attacks have been identified, caught and tried. Three of them were sentenced to death. Last September, suspected JI militants Ahmad Hasan and Iwan Darmawan Mutho were also given death sentences for their alleged roles in the 2004 Australian Embassy bombing.

Publicly moderate, privately tough

A retired army general and former top security minister, the US-trained Yudhoyono clearly fits the mold of Washington's idea of a model Muslim leader: publicly moderate but behind-the-scenes tough on terrorism. Those credentials apparently helped to assuage the US administration's previous concerns about the Indonesian military's spotty human-rights record. In February 2005, just five months into Yudhyono's term, the US lifted long-running restrictions and resumed full International Military Education and Training (IMET) for Indonesian armed forces.

In his meeting this month with US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Yudhoyono said he wanted to establish a permanent military relationship with the US. He has a friend in Rumsfeld, but detractors in Congress. Asked about human-rights reforms in Indonesia's military, Rumsfeld said he did not believe that the ban on US military assistance should have been imposed in the first place. "I am not one of those people who believe that every country should be like the United States," he said.

Indonesian Foreign Affairs Minister Hassan Wirayuda noted a "growing and accepted view in the US to see Indonesia in a much broader context than in snapshots of events like human-rights violations... and military reform".

Of course a politically stable, US-friendly Indonesia serves Washington's broad foreign-policy objectives of combating terrorism and consolidating its military positions in the region — notably at a time China's influence is growing. The US is particularly concerned about possible terrorist threats to the Malacca Strait, the waterway separating Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore that links the Indian and Pacific Oceans and through which half of the world's oil supplies and a third of global commerce flows.

Piracy is rampant in the Malacca Strait, and US and Southeast Asian intelligence services are reportedly investigating possible links between pirates and terrorist groups, particularly JI. The terror rationale: a strike on shipping lanes would cause massive political and economic disruption and make vulnerable the United States' security installations in the region. A bigger US naval presence in the Malacca Strait also conveniently puts Beijing on edge, as most of China's fuel imports travel through the narrow shipping lane.

The US has been pushing to play a bigger role in counter-terrorism patrols, which some Association of Southeast Asian Nations members, particularly Malaysia, have at least privately resisted.

Indonesian Defense Minister Juwono Sudarsono also warned Rumsfeld that the US should not interfere too much in regional counter-terrorism efforts.

"The primary responsibility for security and anti-terrorism measures should lie with national governments, rather than the US forcing its will on other countries," Sudarsono said. "As the largest Muslim country, we are very aware of the perception... that the United States is overbearing, which creates a sense of threat for many groups."

For Washington, a closer relationship with a democratic and moderate Indonesia is an important confirmation that the "war against terrorism" is not a confrontation with Islam, even though there

has definitely been an upsurge in Islamic extremist groups in Indonesia since the fall of president Suharto in 1998.

Islamic groups are lobbying to transform the historically secular country into an Islamic state, while others like JI allegedly still want to pursue jihad against the West. The majority of Southeast Asia's Muslims, including in Indonesia, have widely rejected Islamic radicalism at democratic polls — a point Washington has only belatedly awoken to.

Any indication that Washington is somehow backing state-sponsored human-rights abuses in the pursuit of counter-terrorism policies would hand Indonesia's radicals an important victory — as it has in Iraq. As the US and Yudhoyono's administration draw closer together in fighting the "war on terror" and beyond, there is still a deep sense of mistrust among even moderate Muslims about Washington's intentions.

Therein lies the rub behind Ba'asyir's release, which was done in spite of shrill US and Australian objections. If and when the radical cleric resumes his intolerant, anti-US rhetoric, his speeches will be closely monitored. And if the bombs start to blast again, he'll be the first suspect called in for interrogation. But increasingly, it seems that Ba'asyir and JI — at least for now — are shadows of their former larger selves, and that behind the public posturing the US and Australia couldn't be happier with Yudhoyono's counter-terrorism policies.

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Indonesia terrorists called holy warriors

Associated Press - June 16, 2006

Irwan Firdaus, Solo — A militant cleric who served two years in prison for conspiracy in the 2002 Bali bombings described the blasts Thursday as "God's will" and called those who carried out terrorist attacks across Indonesia holy warriors.

Abu Bakar Bashir also accused President Bush and Australian Prime Minister John Howard of waging wars against Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan and called on them to "convert to Islam." "This is the only way for them to save their souls," Bashir told reporters a day after he was released from prison after serving his 26-month sentence.

Bashir said the Bali bombings that killed 202 people "were God's will" and the survivors should also convert to Islam to ease their pain.

The cleric, who has maintained his innocence, was convicted of conspiracy in the bombings but cleared of more serious terrorism charges, including being the key leader of the al-Qaida-linked militant group Jemaah Islamiyah.

Bashir said young men who carry out suicide attacks in the name of Islam were "holy warriors" because they believed they were defending the oppressed. But he said they were wrong to use bombs in a country at peace like Indonesia. "Why use bombs in a non-conflict zone? Preaching is enough," he said.

Jemaah Islamiyah has been blamed for church bombings across Indonesia in 2000, the 2002 and 2005 Bali bombings and attacks in the capital, Jakarta, in 2003 and 2004. The attacks together killed more than 260 people, many of them foreigners, and have thrust the world's most populous Muslim nation onto the front line of the global war on terror.

The Indonesian government, fearful of militant Islam gaining a foothold in a nation that prides itself on diversity and moderation, launched its first campaign against hardline interpretations of Islam several months ago.

The campaign has won support from many religious leaders, who have agreed to do what they can to convince followers they will not be rewarded in heaven for staging suicide attacks.

Vice President Jusuf Kalla told reporters in Jakarta that authorities could not arrest Bashir for "his thinking and opinions," but said they would act if he broke the law.

The United States and Australia said Wednesday they were disappointed at Bashir's release. His supporters gave him a hero's welcome, shouting "God is great!" as he walked out of jail surrounded by personal security guards. He headed immediately to his home town of Solo.

Bashir said he was happy that American support for the Iraq war seems to have fallen. "I feel sorry for the American people, but it seems now they realize he (Bush) was wrong," Bashir told reporters invited to his home inside the al-Mukmin boarding school complex, which he founded in 1972. Several graduates of the school are in prison for involvement in terrorism and at least two became suicide attackers.

Bashir told Australia, which urged Indonesian authorities Thursday to keep a close eye on the cleric's activities, not to intervene in his nation's affairs. "I don't interfere in Australian affairs, and you should not intervene in ours," he said.

Bashir's freedom has raised concerns that he will energize Indonesia's small, Islamic radical fringe by making impassioned speeches at rallies and mosques. Few, however, believe the cleric will play any direct role in terrorism.

Before the Bali blasts, Bashir was chiefly known for his criticism of the West and his campaign to make his secular nation an Islamic state, a goal he said he would keep pursuing.

Sidney Jones, the Jakarta-based director of the International Crisis Group and a leading expert on Jemaah Islamiyah, said she did not think Bashir's freedom increased the threat of terror attacks in Indonesia.

But "there is no question that his stature has grown in prison and that he's now seen as a symbol of defying the West and the United States in particular," she said. "For that reason, he will be a very popular speaker among many young Muslim crowds in many parts to Indonesia, including many people who have

no interest in violence whatsoever."

GOVERNMENT/CIVIL SERVICE

60% of elected public officials used false diplomas

Detik.com - June 20, 2006

Ken Yunita, Jakarta — The secretary general of Government Watch (Gowa), Andi W Saputra, says that 60 percent of public officials and level II regional heads used false diplomas to get elected.

"Since 2005, Indonesia has held 226 elections of regional heads at the provincial/city/regency level and more than half of these have been marred by the practice of using false diplomas", said Saputra.

These facts were conveyed during a discussion at the Atlet Century Park Hotel in Senayan, South Jakarta, on Tuesday June 20.

According to Saputra, the data was taken based on the persistently high level of false diplomas being used by candidates in the earlier legislative elections as well as during the election of regional heads at regency/city levels throughout Indonesia.

"The use of these false diplomas represents an effort to seek a shortcut that legitimises any kind of means to win political power", he said.(aan)

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Public still positive about government: Survey

Jakarta Post - June 19, 2006

Most Indonesians consider the government of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is doing a good job and trust its leadership, according to a quarterly survey by Roy Morgan Research.

Only 40 percent of respondents in the last quarter

of 2005 agreed with the statement "I don't trust the current government", and it dipped another percentage point during January-March 2006.

"With over 60 percent trusting the government, the score is significantly higher than the views expressed of their own governments by citizens of countries like the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand," said Debnath Guharoy, Roy Morgan Research's regional director for Asia.

Similarly, 60 percent of Indonesians believe that the "government is doing a good job running the country," down from almost 70 percent in the third quarter of 2005 but up from 55 percent during the fourth quarter.

When Yudhoyono came to power, public opinion heralded the departure of President Megawati Soekarnoputri and the arrival of new, perhaps overly high expectations. The government was faced with tough choices last year, but the turbulent times have had their impact on people's perceptions.

Fuel price hikes of last year continue to cast a shadow on just about every aspect of life in Indonesia, although Consumer Confidence went up 2 points to 107 in the first quarter of 2006.

Dealing with the problem of corruption has become a major crusade of the President, and almost 90 percent of the people agree with him about graft's negative effect on society.

Popular indictments of high-profile officials and unpopular verdicts in the courts have each had their impact on this perception in each quarter.

Despite the ups and downs, Indonesians seem to be proud of an historic collective achievement in the resounding vote for democracy. In March 2006, three-quarters of citizens believed that "Democracy is working in Indonesia," a score that is gently moving upwards.

PT Roy Morgan Research interviewed over 6,000 respondents 14 years of age and older, randomly recruited across 16 provinces, covering over 90 percent of Indonesia's population, every 90 days. A total of 6,393 were interviewed during the January-March 2006 quarter, from over 25,000

respondents annually.

CORRUPTION/COLLUSION/NEPOTISM

House balks at antigraft decree

Jakarta Post - June 22, 2006

M. Taufiqurrahman, Jakarta — Opposition is mounting against the government's plan to issue a decree reviving the authority of state oversight bodies to handle corruption cases involving officials.

Politicians at the House of Representatives balked at the proposal, saying that it would compromise the national antigraft drive and sideline the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK).

"The planned regulation should not have the intention of diminishing the role of KPK," House Speaker Agung Laksono said Wednesday. Agung said any efforts to fight graft by the government should not compromise the powers of the judiciary or the KPK.

Lawmaker Eva Kusuma Sundari of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle said the planned the oversight bodies would only work to protect corrupt officials. "The reason KPK was set up in the first place is precisely because the internal oversight bodies had failed to do their job," Eva told The Jakarta Post.

The government recently said it would revive the functions of internal oversight bodies such as the Regional Oversight Body (Bawasda) and the inspectorate general in every ministry and the Financial and Development Oversight Agency (Bawasda) to handle corruption allegations and decide whether they should be investigated by the police or be handled internally.

Speaking after a meeting with Attorney General Abdul Rahman Saleh, Justice and Human Rights Minister Hamid Awaluddin, Cabinet Secretary Sudi Silalahi and police officials, Home Minister M. Ma'ruf said the government was working on a presidential decree to implement the changes.

In the draft, oversight bodies will responsible

for replying to reports of alleged corruption in government departments from the public. Vice President Jusuf Kalla said extra provisions to protect government officials would also be inserted as an amendment to the Law on State Administrations.

However, the decree's critics say it is another example of the government backtracking on its promise to fight graft by working to protect officials from corruption charges.

In a hearing with House Commission III on law and legislation Tuesday, the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) called on the government not to undermine its role.

"We fully understand the government's concern about slander and blackmail. However, the solution should not be to revive the role of internal oversight bodies, but instead to improve the performance of existing law enforcers," KPK deputy chairman Tumpak Hatorangan Panggabean said.

Corruption suspects flee abroad, travel bans issued

Jakarta Post - June 17, 2006

Jakarta — Delinquent debtors and graft suspects will continue to bribe officials and flee the country with the trillions of rupiah they have stolen unless law enforcement agencies are made to clean up their acts, legal experts say.

Textiles tycoon Marimutu Sinivasan — who owes Rp 3.9 trillion (about US\$411 million) to the Indonesian Bank Liquidity Fund (BLBI) and is wanted for allegedly misusing Rp 20 billion in a bank lending scam — is the latest graft suspect to evade law enforcement agencies.

Police first declared Sinivasan a suspect for the 2001 Bank Muamalat lending scam in August last year. Despite this, it took more than eight months for the Directorate of Immigration to slap a travel ban on him — on May 24 — three months after he had already fled the country.

The National Police and the Attorney General's office are both authorized to ask the directorate to issue travel bans. Neither body did so, however, despite Sinivasan ignoring two court summonses over the case.

In the end, it was Finance Ministry officials that requested the ban. The National Police, meanwhile, only declared Sinivasan a fugitive from justice last week after Sinivasan had already left the country.

His lawyer, Mehbob, said Sinivasan had gone to India to seek medical treatment for an ailment he would not name for ethical reasons. The helpful Mehbob promised his client would return to Indonesia after he recovered, without specifying any date.

Other graft suspects and debtors — Agus Anwar, Samadikun Hartono and Bambang Sutrisno — also managed to leave Indonesia before travel bans were imposed on them.

Like Sinivasan, some other BLBI debtors have left the country ostensibly for medical reasons.

While the government has slapped a travel ban on the six remaining big-time BLBI debtors still in the country, it has promised not to prosecute them if they pay back the amounts they owe to the state by this December.

But will the remaining debtors really return the money? Deputy attorney general for special crimes Hendarman Supandji said last month that Sinivasan was known to be one of the most "uncooperative" of the BLBI debtors. Yet he was able to flee the country.

Indonesian Law Studies Foundation chairman Frans Hendra Winarta said the contempt big-time graft suspects regularly showed for the law in this country reflected the authorities' unwillingness to seriously fight corruption here.

He said corruption cases should not be treated as conventional crimes, but extraordinary ones, so they would be handled more professionally.

"Regarding BLBI funds, considering state losses could soar into the billions of dollars, I think

it would be logical to issue travel bans sooner," he said.

When asked why the travel ban on Sinivasan was imposed so late, National Police spokesman Brig. Gen. Anton Bachrul Alam said at the time, police had insufficient grounds to suggest Sinivisan would flee the country.

"We cannot slap a travel ban on a suspect if the evidence is not sufficient," he said.

However, Netta Pane from Indonesian Police Watch said the failure to prevent Sinivasan from fleeing abroad was a "classic example" of the police being unable to act professionally.

"Our government is weak, making it possible for certain irresponsible police officers to play around," Netta said, accusing detectives of colluding with fleeing suspects to help them evade justice.

"What we need is a president with strong commitment to resolving corruption cases. A president ready to dismiss his police chiefs if they fail to do their jobs," Netta said.

Erlangga Masdiana, a criminologist from the University of Indonesia, said the Attorney General's Office and the police were sometimes "insensitive" to the nature of a case.

"Fleeing abroad for health treatments is not a new modus for criminal suspects. The authorities should have been able to anticipate this." Erlangga suspected there was an "emotional bond" between the authorities and suspects. "A suspect certainly has the right to receive the best of medical care. But whether the person is truly sick or not, that needs to be verified first," he said.

Recently, the AGO halted the prosecution of former president Soeharto for his ailing health; a move that drew a strong condemnation from legal experts and activists.

"One thing that could be learned from the handling of the Soeharto case is that he received medical care at home. Therefore, there is no reason for other criminal suspects to get medical treatment overseas," Frans said.

ENVIRONMENT

Residents complain about dust-emitting companies

Jakarta Post - June 22, 2006

Multa Fidrus, Tangerang — Residents of Jatimulya village in Tangerang regency have complained about dust emanating from a nearby plastic pipe company.

"The dust hangs in the air like fog, from midnight to dawn... We are really worried because some of us are suffering respiratory problems and skin diseases," a resident, Husein, told The Jakarta Post on Tuesday.

The factory has been operating for a few years in a warehouse in an industrial complex on Jl. Kali Perancis in Kosambi district.

Kosambi district chief Toto Sudarto said he would take residents' complaints to related agencies and the company.

Barhum, a member of Tangerang regency council who sits on Commission D for environmental affairs, said the commission would pay a visit to the factory.

"If a company establishes a factory in one of the warehouses in the complex, and it pollutes the environment, it is a violation, because the complex is designed only for small-scale industries and has no system in place to reduce dust emissions," he said.

The company's management could not be reached for comment.

Matius Mooy, a security guard at the factory, said the company provided workers with masks because it was concerned about their health.

Separately, residents of Kuta Baru village in Pasar Kemis district say a factory belonging to PT Mitra Bangun Cemerlang on Jl. Raya Cadas Kukun, owned by PT Mitra Bangun Cemerlang, is emitting hazardous substances.

In a protest Wednesday they demanded the company suspend operations until it improved its waste management system. "The company continues to dump

waste into the Cirarab River," said Fajar Sasongko, the chief of one of the village's community units.

The residents also protested against the company on June 4, urging the regency administration to close it down.

The head of the regency's Public Order Agency, Tholib Efendi, said his office did not have the authority to shut down the factory because the company had obtained the required building and operational permits from the administration.

Displaced residents bide their time as sludge spreads

Jakarta Post - June 22, 2006

Indra Harsaputra and ID Nugroho, Jakarta/Sidoarjo — On Tuesday, Vice President Jusuf Kalla offered soothing words to local residents displaced by a huge industrial accident that has spewed tons of foul-smelling mud into their homes.

Those responsible, he said, would be made to provide compensation at whatever price necessary.

A day later, housewife Butin was still cooped up with thousands of others in a traditional market hastily converted into an evacuee center. "We don't need sweet promises," the 45-year-old said as she cradled her nine-month-old son in Pasar Baru Porong market.

"We just want to be able to return home as soon as possible so we can back to work. If there's financial assistance, we haven't got it yet."

Her family, along with about 3,800 other people, has holed up in the newly built market since the accident at the gas well of PT Lapindo Brantas Inc. on May 29. Mudflow from the site has yet to be halted.

On Wednesday, her husband returned to their home in Siring village to see if the 20-cm-high sludge had subsided. He has been unable to work selling traditional snacks. "My baby can't have his milk

because my husband has not been able to do his rounds selling snacks," she told The Jakarta Post.

Siring community leader Nazarudin also said residents were anxious to leave the shelters and get back to their homes.

The number of villagers abandoning their homes to stay in shelters, also including government offices and houses of worship, reached 3,815 as of Wednesday, including 298 under-fives.

More may be forced to leave their homes soon, after a two-meter-high dam encircling Kedungbendo village was damaged Wednesday morning. At least six hectares of rice fields and 100 homes were inundated by the mud.

The head of Sidoarjo regency Social Welfare Office, Hisjam Rosidy, said officials were working with Lapindo to determine the amount of compensation for the residents, although a daily allowance was provided.

"Today, some residents have received Rp 20,000 (less than US\$2) per person. We're still discussing the amount of compensation for houses or rice fields."

In a meeting Wednesday with representatives from 15 companies whose operations have been halted by the accident, Lapindo agreed to provide Rp 1.4 million in compensation for each of the 1,879 workers temporarily laid off. The amount was based on the minimum wage of Rp 682,000 per month in the regency.

Sidoarjo Manpower Office head Bambang S. Widagdo said the company would pay the compensation within the next two months.

"I've asked the 15 companies which could not operate due to the mudflow to provide data on the number of their workers so they can start receiving the money."

However, Lapindo representative Partogi said the company would immediately pay the compensation. Representatives of the companies were dissatisfied.

The human resources manager of PT Primarindo Pangan Makmur, Agung Budianto, said his company

spent an average of Rp 111 million each month to pay its 63 workers. "Now they get only Rp 88 million for two months," he said, saying Lapindo should compensate the workers based on their take-home pay.

Coordinating Minister for the People's Welfare Aburizal Bakrie, whose family is the main shareholder in Lapindo, said he would not visit the accident site because of his other commitments and it was not under his ministerial capacity.

"Besides, it's being handled by Bakrie," he said, referring to his brother Nirwan. He said Lapindo must take responsibility for all the damage caused, including the relocation of residents.

Logging harms humans: Experts

Jakarta Post - June 19, 2006

Jakarta — The illegal logging that continues unchecked across Indonesia has had a worse impact on human lives than expected, experts say.

The unauthorized practice has caused a massive loss of biodiversity, particularly in Papua, that could have eventually been useful to human lives, said Barnabas Suebu, the recently elected new governor of the resources-rich province.

"Our awareness of the biodiversity we are losing in this country is very low. Many undiscovered useful substances are gone due to the rampant illegal logging," he told a seminar on the issue Saturday.

Barnabas said beside red fruits that could be used to treat degenerative diseases and as health supplements, there were thousands of unresearched species in Papua that were now facing extinction.

"In other countries, like Mexico and Singapore, their citizens already understand how important forests are to their lives. Forests provide supplies of biodiversity, oxygen and water, which are extremely important," he said.

The Papua governor-elect said millions of hectares

of untouched forests that were not yet utilized by indigenous people had been discovered by Greenpeace in his province.

In Foja Mount in Papua for example, scientists recently discovered a pristine area, the natural habitat of new species of plants to animals.

"There should be a balance between utility and conservation to create sustainability," Barnabas said.

Papua is one of several regions in Indonesia under serious threat from rapid deforestation. About 40 million hectares of pristine forests are the targets of illegal logging, in line with the growing demand for high quality timber products across the world, particularly in Europe and North America.

Indonesia annually loses about 2.8 million hectares of forest, according to Asro Kamal Rohan, Antara newswire's director. "Everyday we lose about 7,650 hectares of forest. So we lose about 5.3 hectares each minute." The Forestry Ministry said poor law enforcement was the main reason for the massive deforestation of the country, which suffered annual losses amounting to between Rp 30 trillion and Rp 45 trillion.

An expert from Greenomics Indonesia, Elfian Effendi, told The Jakarta Post "the financial losses from the damaged biodiversity are three to four times more expensive than illegal logging".

The losses could happen on three levels; ecosystem, species and genetic resources, he added. "A ruined ecosystem means that species won't be able to sustain themselves due to the loss of food and water sources." "The government and most people overlook the economic value of non-timber forest products because they do not really develop them," Elfian said.

Experts say biodiversity stores the promises of new medical treatments and cures and the planet's creatures and plants could help humans shield themselves from deadly diseases like AIDS and bird flu.

Scientists from the Biodiversitas group have said preventing emerging diseases through biodiversity

conservation is far more cost effective than developing vaccines to combat them later.

Barnabas said Indonesians should plant trees first before they cut any down.

"What happens in Indonesia is the other way around," he said, adding that he would tighten the requirements for forest concessions in Papua.

"We plan to hold a conference on biodiversity in Papua to raise awareness and educate the public," said Barnabas.

Sidoarjo mud protested by upset workers

Jakarta Post - June 17, 2006

ID Nugroho and Indra Harsaputra, Sidoarjo — Residents of the once-peaceful East Java town of Sidoarjo are becoming increasingly agitated about the ongoing flow of hot mud from a gas drilling well.

On Friday, some 200 workers from a nearby factory whose operation has been affected by the mudflow staged a protest outside the office of PT Lapindo Brantas Inc., the company that owns the well. They demanded compensation for lost wages.

Arriving on three trucks and dozens of motorcycles, the workers from snack producer CV. Inti Sari Pratama waved banners and posters with their demands all the way to Lapindo's office.

One of the workers, Mustafa Aji, said they were forced to protest because their future is uncertain. "Since the factory was closed two weeks ago, we haven't been getting paid. This is all because of Lapindo," he told The Jakarta Post.

The mudflow has affected at least 13 factories since it began late last month. It has also flooded hectares of paddy fields and inundated villagers' houses.

Mustafa said each worker usually receives Rp 20,000 (US\$2) a day. "Who is going to pay us compensation? Our company is not willing to pay

because the factory is closed," he said.

Lapindo's representatives, accompanied by officials from the Oil and Gas Executive Agency (BP Migas), met with 10 representatives of the protesting workers. They told the workers they would discuss the compensation with the factory's management. "They promised to resolve the matter next week," said Muhamad Hadi, one of the workers' representatives.

Lapindo's spokesman, Budi Santoso, said the company would try to find a mutually beneficial solution.

"We (Lapindo) also feel sorry for the workers. I'm just asking the workers to help deal with the mudflow problem. Many workers working on the mudflow feel afraid, threatened," said Budi, without elaborating.

The mudflow has also triggered a clash between residents from Balung Kenongo and Kedung Bendo villages. Residents from one village damaged a dam to block the mudflow, but the move caused the mud to stream into the other village. No casualties were reported in the incident. Police are now guarding the two villages.

Almost three weeks after the hot mudflow was first spotted, no detailed plan to resolve the problem has been announced.

"We can't predict the mud rushing out... all we can do is prevent it from spreading," Lapindo's safety, health and environment official, Agus Tanzil, told the Post Friday.

"No matter what experts say, the mudflow is happening because of a natural process and can't be mathematically predicted." The company has constructed three ponds to accommodate around 480,000 cubic meters of mudflow. With an estimated 20,000 cubic meters of mud streaming out per day, the ponds would fill up in 24 days. The company has also transported mud to be dumped at a location approved by the local administration.

"Our target is to solve the mudflow problem in a month. We hope everyone will stay calm and not make any conflicting statements that can confuse people," Lapindo's general manager Imam Agustino

said.

In Jakarta, the National Police spokesman, Brig. Gen. Anton Bachrul Alam, said Friday that mining and geological experts from Australia and Canada will assist Indonesian authorities in investigating the cause of the hot mud eruption.

He said the police assigned a special task force to Sidoarjo on Thursday to investigate the case.

HEALTH & EDUCATION

Heads up: Students studying with helmets on

Jakarta Post - June 23, 2006

Cianjur — Administrations of a dilapidated state elementary school in Gunungmanik village are making pupils wear safety helmets during classes — just in case the roof crumbles in.

"I was gravely concerned that the flimsy school is still being used although the teachers and headmaster know only too well it endangers the pupils' lives," said Iwan Permana, an Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle councillor after visiting the school near the regency capital.

"How can the Cianjur administration turn a blind eye to this problem? The school's fate does not fit with its akhlakul karimah (good deeds) campaign — the refrain about the regency's achievements we constantly hear from officials."

Joni Martin, 40, a teacher at the school, told Antara the headmaster had repeatedly written to the Cianjur regent asking the school buildings be repaired, but to no avail.

Entrance fees for state universities skyrocket

Jakarta Post - June 20, 2006

Yuli Tri Suwarni, Bandung — State higher learning institutes have invited controversy by applying steep admission fees for those who can afford,

such as Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) when it sought Rp 45 million (US\$5,000) in education development fees from each new student in 2003.

This year, Bandung's Padjadjaran University (Unpad) is asking new students to pay up to Rp 150 million in such fees.

Unpad spokesman Hadi Suprpto Arifin, disclosed that more than 9,000 high school graduates had applied for the exclusive entrance program that offers 1,500 available placings based on the admission exam (SPMB). Under the scheme, students are required to pay education development fees ranging from Rp 7.5 million to Rp 150 million, according to their financial capacity and the course of study they choose.

"The lowest, at Rp 7.5 million, is for those applying for the fisheries or arts school, and the most costly is the medical school, with the fees set at 150 million," Hadi said in Bandung.

This year, ITB has continued with its exclusive entrance program, offering more than 1,000 placings. ITB's academic affairs vice rector Adang Surahman said that the number was more than half the regular graduate students admitted through the SPMB of 1,750 students annually.

The managements of higher learning institutions have cited the ever increasing operational costs for the prohibitive fees. Hadi acknowledged that students who were accepted through the SPMB would receive a subsidy of Rp 5.5 million each year from the government. However, he said that it cost Unpad between Rp 12 million to Rp 20 million annually to provide education for each student.

"Nevertheless, we have to seek ways to cover our costs, such through as the exclusive entrance program, while at the same time we also have to improve lecturers' welfare," said Hadi.

The university has set the highest fee for the medical school since it is a hot favorite, accepting only 30 students through the special program.

The school has been offering a program for overseas students with English as the medium of instruction for the past four years, with an

admission fee of US\$10,000 and tuition fee of \$8,000 annually.

Unpad covered its operational expenses previously by conducting diploma and extension programs, providing around 5,800 places each year.

Adang also cited increasing operational costs for the rising fees, saying that ITB's operational costs amounted to Rp 400 billion annually. "As much as 25 percent is subsidized by the government, 25 percent from students' parents. We must seek the remaining 50 percent from various programs," said Adang.

Despite the controversy, Adang said that the number of students who had expressed interest in the exclusive entrance program had been increasing. When it was opened in 2003, only 2,200 applied, while 5,500 potential students applied this year.

ISLAM/RELIGION

Scholars advocate tolerant Islam

Jakarta Post - June 23, 2006

Jakarta — The second International Conference of Islamic Scholars (ICIS) ended with a call for Muslims living in non-Muslims areas to promote their religion as one of moderation and tolerance.

The scholars declared Wednesday night that Muslim minorities in pluralistic societies should play a greater role in addressing matters that challenge efforts to promote dialog between minorities and non-Muslim majorities.

The ICIS, concerned about increased narrow-mindedness and extremism in Muslim communities, took the stance to promote peace, justice, moderation and prosperity for people of all faiths. They said it should be done through a commitment to universal aspirations for a better world where both the physical and spiritual happiness of all humankind were fully realized.

During the two-day conference, the participants were divided into three working groups to discuss religiosity, injustice and poverty, and also

decide on strategies for change in the economic, social and educational sectors.

The working groups then gathered together in a plenary session, led by the foreign affairs chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama, Rozy Munir, to issue recommendations. The session made 37 recommendations for an action plan, including ICIS's response to globalization, conflict resolution, economic development, poverty eradication, education and social progress as well as future directions.

"We together, with other moderate powers, such as the USA, the Middle East, Europe, Australia and many others, will coordinate (our efforts) to introduce Islam to the world as a moderate and tolerant religion," said Nahdlatul Ulama chairman Hasyim Muzadi, the country's largest Muslim organization which arranged the event. He acknowledged the ICIS had a difficult task in coordinating efforts for conflict resolution. He also said that since the ICIS enjoyed good relations with the Organization of the Islamic Conference, both organizations would talk with the United Nations about how to expand the moderate movement.

As a moderate group, Hasyim said, Islam would not take sides in issues of global polarization, but would stand for justice and equality. "We have to develop independent financial systems so we won't depend on other groups. We also have to create a system between countries in ICIS for an economic cooperation." In its recommendation, the conference advised governments of Muslim countries to explore practical ways and modalities for promoting greater cooperation in trade, investment, economy, and other development sectors, including the enhancement of the Islamic financial and banking system.

The ICIS also advised governments of Muslim-populated countries to promote the Islamic financial and banking systems, to facilitate the participation of Muslims in the systems and to ensure their stability and sustainability.

Hasyim also mentioned that ICIS would work on education, science, and health.

For the action plan, the conference requested its

secretary-general commission the development of applicable frameworks that promote the value of Islamic teachings on relevant subjects of human interest, such democracy, human rights, education and health as well as the prevention of corruption and drug abuse.

"We will meet in small groups once in every three or four months to accomplish the programs," said Hasyim.(05) Selected recommendations: 1. To invite decision-makers, both from public and private sectors, to develop policies that ensure the fulfillment of Muslim women's rights, and to create programs to empower women's participation in the economic, social and political process.

2. To make an effort to narrow the gap between schools of thoughts in Islam in order to maintain and foster the unity of the blessed Muslims so they will not be easily divided into conflict.

3. To stress the inalienable rights of every country to promote research, production and the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

4. To encourage civil society organizations to participate in economic and social affairs to get the greatest benefits for all Muslim communities.

5. To encourage the establishment of networking among small and medium-scale enterprises from Muslim-populated countries.

Courts must get tougher on violent militias: Sutanto

Jakarta Post - June 23, 2006

Jakarta — The courts should severely punish members of radical groups convicted of violent offenses, National Police chief Gen. Sutanto says.

Sutanto, who has been criticized for being too soft on ethnic gangs and religious vigilante groups, said the police had done their utmost to arrest and legally process offenders from these groups.

However, he said the courts convicted only a few

members on criminal charges brought against them by the police and those who were tried generally received light sentences.

"Don't say we are not dealing with them, we can prove otherwise," Sutanto told reporters at a press briefing.

"The thing is, the (court) verdicts are always very lenient. The press can check the process from the beginning, and see that often (militia members) get let off after we hand them over (to prosecutors). We are getting tired of arresting them," he said after a Cabinet meeting at the presidential office.

Dozens of members of the Islam Defenders Front have been arrested for vandalizing entertainment centers and brothels during the past five years. However, only the group's leader, Habib Rizieq, was jailed for any significant time in 2002, following a spate of attacks on night spots.

Last month, police in Bekasi arrested 21 FPI members for vandalism after they attacked brothels in the area, however, their trials appear to have stalled.

In April, police arrested one person after an FPI mob attacked Playboy Indonesia's Jakarta offices. His case also seems not to have reached the courts.

FPI members were also part of groups that stormed religious centers belonging to the Islamic Ahmadiyah sect in Bogor and Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, earlier this year, along with the offices of the Danish Embassy in February. Although police arrested several perpetrators, none have been taken to court.

"The laws mandate hefty punishments but the perpetrators walk free or get away with only light sentences. And then the public puts the blame on us. Are these (legal) institutions afraid (to hand down severe punishments)?," Sutanto said.

He said police had no plans to revive the restrictive Soeharto-era 1985 Law on Mass Organizations, which allows the government to disband all organizations deemed to be causing public disorder. A better deterrent, he said,

would be for the courts to hand down tough sentences to militia members found guilty of violent offenses.

"Give them the maximum penalty. The Criminal Code allows the court to hand down penalties of five years in jail, or even life imprisonment (in some cases)," he said.

Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Widodo A.S. earlier pledged to get tough on violent groups, by outlawing them or forcibly disbanding them if necessary.

Habib Rizieq, meanwhile, has said FPI members were taking the law into their own hands because police were failing to crack down on "un-Islamic" behavior. He said militia groups like the FPI would voluntarily disband if the police did their jobs properly.

"There are many non-government organizations and civil groups that receive foreign funds. Why isn't the government targeting them? "Why target us, we who fight in the name of our faith against injustice? We'll disband when the government can put an end to injustice and poor law enforcement," Rizieq said.

Government softens stance on hard-line groups

Jakarta Post - June 19, 2006

Jakarta — The government will embrace hard-line groups in an effort to persuade them to stop using violence, even though it has already been proven that the groups have broken the law.

The government earlier sought to revise the 1985 Law on the Freedom to Organize to allow for the disbanding of hard-line organizations deemed to have disrupted security and public order. The government planned to insert a new article to empower them to take supervisory actions, including the dissolving of such organizations.

However, under the current law, the government already has the authority to disband any

organization that has disrupted security and public order, received or given aid from other countries without the government's permission or disseminated the ideology of Marxism-Leninism.

"Before disbanding them, we will embrace and empower them first so they stop using violence," said Sudarsono Hardjoesoekarto, the Director General of National Unity and Politics at the Ministry of Home Affairs, on Saturday.

The move to disband hard-line groups comes as the government faces mounting pressure to take stern action against groups accused of using violence to further their aims.

Sudarsono said the government would ask the groups to register their organizations according to their area of establishment.

"Local organizations can register with their regencies, cities, or provinces, while national organizations can register at the home affairs ministry," he said during a talk show organized by the Media Indonesia daily newspaper and Ramaco FM.

He said after the groups registered, the government would look at using a closer cooperative program, such as training, until they stopped the use of violence. "If they still use it we will remind them that the government can disband them based on the law," he said.

Islam Defender Front (FPI) leader Habib Riziq Shihab said his organization used violence because the police did not work to eradicate the existence of prostitution and gambling in the country.

He said he was disappointed the police did little to enforce the law. "If the police dare to enforce the law, then the FPI will voluntary disperse," Habib said.

Separately, criminologist Adrianus Meliala said the problem could be solved if the police were able to enforce laws. "The idea of revising the law could make the government find it more difficult to control hard-line organizations," he said.

Adrianus said the government will have to prove the groups have used violence in order to disband

them, which could be very debatable. "It is difficult to say that they have violated the law because they have permits and statutes," he said.

Betawi Brotherhood Forum (FBR) chairman Fadloli El Muhir told The Jakarta Post his organization's principles were based on Pancasila and were contained in the FBR statutes.

Adrianus said the police had the authority to arrest members of any organization who were proved to have disrupted public order. "The police can take measures against the person because it is the police's authority to create public order," he said.

Adrianus raised concerns that if the government used the law to disband the groups, then it could misuse the law to disband any organization working against it.

During the New Order regime, former president Soeharto frequently used the law to close groups in opposition to him. He would claim such groups were communist organizations and thus were against Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution.

Nahdlatul Ulama chairman Hasyim Muzadi agreed with Adrianus on the dissolution of organizations, saying the problem could be solved simply if the police took stronger actions against them. "The government can disband the hard-line organizations, but they can form a new organization. It does not solve the problem," he said.

From political thuggery to ethnic gang wars

Jakarta Post - June 22, 2006

Meidyatama Suryodiningrat, Jakarta — Newly installed Jakarta Police chief Insp. Gen. Adang Firman was right when he pledged that combating thuggery would be a priority during his tenure.

But there are question marks on whether he will have the courage to succeed where his predecessors did not.

Criminal undercurrents are a persistent hazard in any metropolitan. They breed insecurity, lawlessness and a high-cost economy through rampant illegal levies.

But two groups — that shall be arrantly nameless in this article — in particular embody the unified loathing of decent Jakartans.

Unlike other delinquent elements which operate in Jakarta's underworld, these two groups sought to ascend and even legitimize their hooliganism using ethnic or religious platforms.

Despite their small numbers, they cannot be dismissed as marauding thugs. The freedom of voraciousness accorded to them has hijacked national headlines and been falsely gauged as predictors of Indonesia's radicalism.

Their desire to go 'legit' is only natural, since the seeds of their past were political. Both groups were formed as an outgrowth of the New Order's culture of using paramilitary groups as vehicles for political coercion. Hence the suspicion of past connections to the military and police.

The first group was set up as part of the political maneuvering to counter student demonstrations ahead of the 1999 Special Session of the People's Consultative Assembly and adopted an extremely conservative religious ideological platform.

As a current Cabinet minister privately revealed when he spoke about the group: "I can say with confidence, although I cannot provide legal evidence, that the commander of the (Jakarta) police force at that time had links (with this group)".

As the group developed, it exploited narrow-minded religiosity to justify sweepings and to ransack bars and nightclubs during Ramadhan.

There have been allegations that this was simply a camouflage to extort money from gambling and prostitution businesses. When issues of sharia became vogue a few years later they were well placed in the front lines of the sectarian push, being able to mobilize the masses of urban poor

who had joined their ranks.

The second group paints itself as the footmen for Jakarta's disenfranchised indigenous population. However it is not itself a member of the Betawi Consultative Body — an umbrella organization of ethnic Betawi organizations.

Despite its ethnic platform, it began as an anti-Megawati Soekarnoputri movement. Its chairman was a member of the non-Megawati splinter faction of the now defunct Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI).

The group's birth coincided with a commemoration by Megawati's supporters of the fifth anniversary of the bloody attack on PDI headquarters. By coincidence, the Jakarta military commander at the time of the attack was none other than Sutiyoso.

Based in East Jakarta, the group quickly attracted the urban poor by means of providing them jobs and capital in the informal economy.

It is worth noting that the group was established on the heels of a campaign by the local administration to fight street gangs by "reintegrating" them into society with jobs such as local guards.

What effectively occurred was an opportunity to be seized to "cooperate" with the local administration who allocated billions of rupiah for this program.

Where the new Jakarta Police chief's political allegiance lies with respect to these groups is unknown.

But Adang cannot afford to emulate the lethargy of his predecessors. These two groups have become a malignant cancer that will be detrimental to Jakarta's stability and his own career.

Unlike New Order paramilitaries, both groups act independently without a major financial backer or political patron. They are pendulous entities whose allegiances are indiscriminate according to the necessities of survival.

Both groups fend for themselves to sustain the economic needs of their expanding ranks. Without political money flowing in, these groups survive on various small ventures and levies they are able

to collect.

Nevertheless these sectors are unsustainable. They will need to “expand and diversify” into more lucrative avocations — both formal and illegal. This will eventually lead to the encroachment on “activities” traditionally monopolized by underworld mobs.

Debt collecting, for example, is one lucrative field in which these two groups still have a limited foothold but must begin to consider if they are to augment their coffers.

Hence the prospect of socio-religious gang wars on the horizon if nothing is done. Shades of the 1998 Ketapang riot in West Jakarta come to mind.

Major Muslim groups spearhead moderate campaign

Jakarta Post - June 22, 2006

Ridwan Max Sijabat, Jakarta — Leaders of Nadhlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the country’s two largest Muslim organizations, say they are committed to campaigning for moderate Islam to counter the emergence of militant groups.

They pledged Wednesday that they would not seek strict religious formalism in pluralist Indonesia — meaning the upholding of the outward signs and practices of the religion — nor tolerate the use of violence in the name of the religion.

Muhammadiyah chairman Din Syamsuddin said his organization sought “substantivism” instead of formalism because of the country’s multiethnic, multireligious composition, as well as the commonly shared cause of fighting injustice and poverty.

He stressed that radical groups did not represent Islam, and therefore terrorism should not be simplistically linked to the religion because of the their misuse of its name.

"No religion, including Islam, tolerates any use of violence. The terrorists are those who are not patient and misunderstand the religion," he said

after presenting his paper on religiosity at the second International Conference of Islamic Scholars.

He blamed the actions of violent radical groups on law enforcers who were slow to act against their militancy. "The police should take action against mass organizations using violence in the name of religion because their violent acts are against the law."

But Din also said the motivation of such groups must be identified. "As long as the law is not enforced and injustice is found in society, radicalism or terrorism will gain ground in the country."

NU chairman Hasyim Muzadi expressed optimism that the two organizations would be able to counter radicalism and liberalism which emerged with the onset of the reform movement in 1998.

"NU will continually campaign for the true Islam and its rich values among Muslims, so that they have an appropriate understanding about how to fight for Islamic values in the pluralist society."

Hasyim, who said radical groups would eventually disband if law enforcers took a firm stand on their use of violence, acknowledged there were mistakes by some organizations in fighting for the implementation of sharia law.

Din and Hasyim agreed the ongoing conference was an appropriate forum for Islamic scholars to promote moderate Islam and to hold interfaith dialog with representatives of other religions.

"Participants from Islamic countries have been aware of the importance of promoting the moderate line of Islam to help build global peace, and fight against the injustice and poverty that affects the majority of Muslims," said Hasyim.

He believed such interfaith dialog would help eliminate the hegemony of some countries in the world.

"In February, for instance, the American Communion of Churches made an apology for their inability to prevent the United States government from

launching its aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq," he said.

Hard-line groups reject Pancasila as sole ideology

Jakarta Post - June 22, 2006

Jakarta — Conservative religious leaders are marshaling hard-line Islamic groups to counter the growing public pressure for the government to outlaw organizations that commit violence in the name of religion.

In a gathering held at Jakarta's prestigious Grand Istiqlal Mosque in Central Jakarta on Wednesday and organized by the Indonesian Council of Ulema (MUI), representatives from some 50 hard-line groups met to reject calls for the government to disband them or force them to adopt the state ideology of Pancasila.

The groups, including the Islam Defenders Front (FPI), Hizbut Tahrir, the Betawi Brotherhood Forum (FBR) and the Youth Islamic Movement (GPI), also reiterated their support for the sharia bylaws enacted by a number of regions and the pornography bill currently being deliberated at the House of Representatives.

They vowed to continue to protest the publication of the Playboy Indonesia magazine.

MUI last year issued a controversial fatwa that banned all forms of religious pluralism, secularism and liberalism.

Also in attendance were individuals from Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the country's two largest Muslim organizations.

The chairman of MUI's fatwa commission, Ma'ruf Amin, led the forum. He said a three-day meeting by MUI in the East Java town of Ponorogo last month had agreed Muslim organizations in Indonesia needed to unite to address their problems.

MUI needed to protect Muslim communities from moral decadence such as pornography and to empower them through building education and the economy,

Ma'ruf said.

He said the state-sanctioned council would coordinate the movements of Muslim organizations. "We gather here today to oppose the idea of disbanding Muslim organizations," Hizbut Tahrir chairman M. Al Khaththath told the gathering.

He said he had met with Sudarsono Hardjoesoekarto, the Home Ministry director-general of national unity and politics, to warn him against dissolving any Islamic group because it would be against a 1985 law guaranteeing the freedom to organize.

Sudarsono has said the law authorized the government to disband any organization that disrupted security or the public order. Groups, which received "illegal" aid from overseas or promoted Marxist or Leninist teachings could also be outlawed, he said.

The law also required every organization to adopt the Pancasila as their primary ideology.

Instead of immediately taking action against violent hard-line groups, Sudarsono said the government would meet with them first to persuade them to stop using violence.

The government has been widely criticized for refusing to act firmly against the FPI and other radical groups blamed for a series of attacks on churches and minority Islamic sects.

Wednesday's gathering came amid increasing calls by nationalist and moderate Muslims groups for the nation to revitalize Pancasila as the state ideology after more than 20 local and provincial administrations started adopting sharia-style laws.

Muslim moderates told to stand up and be counted

Jakarta Post - June 21, 2006

Tony Hotland, Jakarta — Empowering moderates to speak up in the increasingly divided Islamic world is essential to promote peace and cultivate interfaith harmony, the chairman of Indonesia's

largest Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama said Tuesday.

Hasyim Muzadi, addressing the opening of the second International Conference of Islam Scholars, said challenges in today's Islamic world required the strengthening of the voice of moderates in the modernization of the religion.

"Moderates are not those without an opinion. Moderates are those with strong views based on a conviction about what is right and just. Moderates strike the balance between faith and tolerance for peace and social welfare, and maintain solidarity."

Hasyim hoped the conference, organized by the NU and bringing together more than 300 scholars from 53 countries, would be able to serve such a need through "pooling intellectual resources and integrate endeavors to promote solidarity".

He also said there should be concerted efforts to eliminate the use of symbols of religion to justify acts of violence and terror. "People need to share common ideas about peace, and this conference is seeking for us to promote modernization in Islam. There is such a discouraging phenomenon in the form of conflicts that continue to plague the Islamic world."

In his remarks, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono warned about the rising global prejudice against Islam, and urged Muslims to demonstrate the religion's teachings were peaceful and encourage understanding of different faiths.

"Islamophobia is an emerging issue for today's Muslims. It is pertinent for us to think about how Muslims should live in countries where Islam is not the religion of the majority. It's also pertinent for us to show, through exemplary deeds and persistent advocacy, that Muslims are peaceful."

Yudhoyono, noting drawn-out conflicts in Muslim populated countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Sudan, stressed the importance of enhancing the role of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to reach a resolution.

"It's important to ensure that we tell our non-

Muslim fellows what we want them to understand as it is to ensure that we listen to what they want us to understand. We reach out as we take out." The head of hard-line organization Islam Defenders Front (FPI), Habib Rizieq, said that the world's governments should provide immediate answers to the problems of global-scale injustice, which he said was the cause of such radicalism.

However, he declined to comment on whether hard-line organizations should bear religious symbols in striving for their cause.

Defiant Bashir to continue his jihad

Sydney Morning Herald - June 16, 2006

Mark Forbes, Jakarta — A beaming Abu Bakar Bashir walked out of the gates of Cipinang jail yesterday, pledging a renewed campaign to impose sharia law on Indonesia in front of hundreds of chanting devotees.

The United States and Australian governments expressed disappointment and concern at the release of a founder and leader of the terrorist network Jemaah Islamiah.

He served less than 26 months for blessing the 2002 Bali bombings that killed 202 people. Bashir's sentence was reduced for good behaviour and to celebrate Indonesia's 61st anniversary of independence.

Wearing his trademark white skullcap, the 68-year-old cleric demanded that Indonesia's leaders save the nation from darkness by imposing sharia law on the secular state.

"We have to fight to uphold the Islamic law," he told supporters. "We have to live by the words of the prophet. Once again, we have to strengthen the Muslim brotherhood." Bashir made no mention of combating the "infidel" nations of America and Australia but a book commemorating his days in jail, published this week, is full of vitriolic attacks against Australia and the Prime Minister, John Howard.

About 40 black-jacketed Islamic bodyguards linked arms to escort Bashir through the crush to a convoy of cars and buses, to embark on a 12-hour journey to his home in Solo, central Java.

In Solo, Bashir will return to his Ngruki boarding school, dubbed the "Ivy League" of educating terrorists by the International Crisis Group. Most of the Bali bombers were graduates. He will greet students before resuming teaching there.

The Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, said he was disappointed at the length of the sentence but accepted the decision of Indonesia's courts.

There were fears Bashir might train and inspire more terrorists, Mr Downer said. "I have some concerns about his advocacy — there's no question of that. This is somebody who believes in the jihadist principles."

A US embassy spokesman said there was deep disappointment at Bashir's release. "The possibility that a person responsible for such a terrible crime could go free after a light sentence of 30 months is cause for concern."

An Indonesian police spokesman said Bashir's release was "nothing special", but his activities would continue to be monitored. The Indonesian Foreign Minister, Hassan Wirayuda, said Bashir's release was "only a legal matter ... not a political matter".

Greeting Bashir outside the jail, the head of the Islamic Propagation Board, Hussein Umar, blamed Australian interference for Bashir's imprisonment. The claim that he headed a terrorist network was a conspiracy by the West, he said.

"Terrorism is a global issue designed by the US and its allies. They're trying to label Islam as identical to terrorism. That means every Muslim is terrorist." An organiser of the hardline Islamic Defenders Front, Eka Jaya, said linking Bashir to terrorism was a slander.

"It is a big conspiracy against Islam, and these people will carry out scorched-earth policy toward Islam." With Karuni Rompies

ECONOMY & INVESTMENT

Government prepares subsidy for farmers

Jakarta Post - June 23, 2006

Rendi Akhmad Witular, Jakarta — The government will provide subsidies for farmers engaged in planting palm oil, cacao, rubber and corn in an effort to boost the country's plantation output and create jobs.

Agriculture Minister Anton Apriyantono the assistance would take the form of loans channeled by banks to palm oil, cacao and rubber farmers. Corn farmers will receive seeds.

"The interest-rate subsidy will be for farmers in Sumatra and Kalimantan, while the free seeds will be for corn farmers in Sulawesi only," said Anton after meeting with Vice President Jusuf Kalla Thursday.

He expected the subsidies to help the government met its target of expanding plantations by 500,000 hectares annually.

The government will allocate a total of Rp 1.7 trillion (US\$182 million) this year to cover the subsidies, of which some Rp 200 billion would be distributed through state-owned Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI).

BRI president director Sofyan Basir said that of the 18 percent interest rate imposed on farmers, the government will pick up 8 percent while farmers pay the remaining 10 percent.

"The amount of the subsidies will depend on developments with the interest rate. The loan will have a grace period of five years for palm oil farmers and seven years for cacao and rubber farmers," said Sofyan. The bank will use the farmers' plantations as collateral.

The government has yet to finish calculating the amount of the subsidies allocated for cacao and rubber farmers. With the aid, palm oil farmers are expected to be able to establish some 50,000 hectares of new plantations this year, with as much as 300,000 hectares estimated for next year.

According to the Indonesian Palm Oil Producers Association (GAPKI), there are 5.2 million hectares of palm oil plantations in Indonesia. With crude palm oil production forecast to reach 15.2 million tons this year, Indonesia is likely to overtake Malaysia as the top producer in the world.

Meanwhile, Anton also said that his ministry would allocate Rp 100 billion this year for the free corn seeds, and Rp 500 billion next year to help open some 600,000 hectares of new corn plantation land in Sulawesi.

Last year, the country produced 11.4 million tons of corn and imported around 400,000 tons. Demand for corn is expected to grow by at least 10 percent this year, with around 21.17 million estimated for 2010.

Due to the availability of idle land, the government has declared Sulawesi as the country's center for corn production. "The subsidies will be taken from the state budget. The government will continue providing them every year until 2009," said Anton, adding that Indonesia's agricultural sector had lagged behind in comparison to other countries in Asia.

The sector's slow development is primarily due to mismanagement of resources by previous governments and corruption among officials and local regulatory bodies, who take advantage of unclear regulations. At present, the nation's agricultural growth stands at an average of 3.5 percent per annum.

Shoddy town planning 'lowers productivity'

Jakarta Post - June 22, 2006

Jakarta — Unscrupulous officials who fast-track developments without concern for planning laws are favoring big developers over common Indonesians and are choking the productivity of cities, costing the country trillions in lost rupiah, experts say.

"Government officials, as both regulators and operators of spatial city planning, issue permits without thinking about the long-term side effects of commercialization," said Aprianto Usman, a member of Indonesian Alumni of Canadian Institutions.

He said bad or no spatial planning led to the inequitable situation in Jakarta where developers often built where they pleased, invariably displacing or inconveniencing nearby communities with the traffic chaos and pollution the buildings created.

At the same time, developers ignore government regulations compelling them to create low-cost housing for the poor.

"There is no punishment for officials who violate laws about spatial planning because of the poor enforcement in this country. Everything is done for the sake of capital," Aprianto told The Jakarta Post during a spatial planning seminar on Tuesday.

Overseas, business developers generally built big malls in suburban areas, Aprianto said. The reason for this was to avoid creating inner-city traffic jams and to enable these malls to function as recreation destinations.

However, here: "the time we could use for being productive is used up on the streets because of the traffic congestion," he said. "We should consider those malls as we would regular markets in cities. Everywhere there is a market, there is always a traffic jam surrounding the place," Aprianto said.

He noted that spatial planning laws in Indonesia were generally flouted because adhering to them would cost developers more. "Actually, if the planning is good and we implement the plans correctly, the cost is cheaper compared to fixing those problems occurring due to the (later) chaotic implementation of planning."

Aprianto and the Communication Forum of Foreign Alumni (FORKA) have been helping the Directorate General for Spatial Planning to revise the 1992 Town Planning Law, which they say is unsustainable. FORKA, which consists of 12 groups

of graduates from institutions in 12 countries, aims to make Indonesia a healthier place to live.

In the revision of the law, the group has suggested people are educated about the positive impacts of good city planning.

Directorate head Hermanto Dadak said the development of shopping malls and big supermarkets should be focused in suburban areas, such as Bogor, Tangerang, Bekasi and Bumi Serpong Damai.

"Theoretically, 60 percent of the communities who live in those satellite cities should be able to live and work without leaving their areas," Hermanto told the Post. "That has not happened yet. Those neighboring cities function more like dormitories rather than satellite cities," he said.

Hermanto noted that vehicles could once make round trips from Cikarang, an industrial center, to Tanjung Priok in a single day. These days, because of to all the malls constructed along the way and heavy commuter traffic, it would take two days to make the circuit, he said.

In the development of the new spatial planning bill, the FORKA team has included measures to prevent officials from taking bribes and issuing illegal permits. It said the development of green areas within cities was a better choice than building malls.

Economists: Agriculture sector worrying

Tempo Interactive - June 21, 2006

Agus Supritanto, Manado — The productivity of the Indonesian agriculture sector has declined.

Etty Puji Lestari, a member of the Association of Indonesian Economic Graduates (ISEI), has revealed that between 2001 and 2003, a total of 610,596 hectares of productive paddy-fields were turned into housing or used for other activities.

There has been an increase in the number of farmers from 20.8 million in 1993 to 25.4 million in 2002, despite the declining total of paddy-

fields. There has also been a dramatic decrease in average amount of land owned by farmers down to less than a quarter of a hectare per farmer.

This situation is further worsened by the decrease in farmers' incomes. They only obtain an income per harvest season of between Rp325,000 and Rp543,000. "This means that they only obtain an income of between Rp81,000 and Rp135,000 per month," said Etty during the ISEI seminar at Manado yesterday.

Kalla defends acceptance of new CGI loans

Jakarta Post - June 17, 2006

Tony Hotland and Urip Hudiono, Jakarta — Vice President Jusuf Kalla says the government has no option but to take up the new loans offered recently by foreign creditors as it lacks other financing sources to fully cover this year's budgetary needs.

He told reporters Friday that both issuing more bonds and relying on the privatization program for extra money contained serious drawbacks.

Furthermore, the reallocation of unspent loan commitments was far from being a straightforward matter as many of these loans were tied to projects already underway, while the full disbursement of others was scheduled to take place over a number of years.

Foreign creditors grouped in the Consultative Group on Indonesia (CGI) offered Wednesday a total package of US\$5.4 billion in loans and grants for this year to support the government's medium-term development plans, and to help with the reconstruction of disaster-hit areas.

Kalla was responding to criticism from some quarters of the government's move to seek new foreign loans despite what they say is the country's already high level of sovereign debt.

State Minister for National Development Planning Paskah Suzetta said Thursday that the government

may not take up all of the pledged loans given the high level of unspent funding allocations in the current state budget. The exact amount would be determined during the upcoming talks on the budget's annual mid-year revision between the government and the House of Representatives.

Kalla said the government had sought other domestic financing sources to cover the cost of the budget, such as through more privatizations, but was faced with the reality that only limited assets remained that would be of interest to investors, as well as the likelihood of a political backlash from the antiprivatization lobby.

"Everything has been sold — all the good, high-value assets, including Indosat. Nobody really wants to buy the remaining low-value ones," he said. "And if we were to offer what valuable assets remain, there would be the usual outcry from the House and the unions. That's the problem with privatization in Indonesia."

The government had planned to offer a 7 percent stake in state gas utility PT PGN to raise Rp 3.5 trillion (US\$376 million) in privatization proceeds last year, but then canceled the plan. Meanwhile, the overall target for the privatization program this year has been set at a mere Rp 1 trillion.

Kalla further said that the issuing of more government bonds would be more expensive in terms of maturities and interest costs.

Indonesian sovereign bonds currently carry an interest rate of around 12 percent, as compared to between 2 and 3 percent on concessional foreign loans, which have maturities of between 30 and 40 years, he said. Government bonds normally have 10-year maturities, with only one bond series currently in the market having a 30-year maturity.

Separately, Coordinating Minister for the Economy Boediono said the latest loan and grant offers from the CGI would not worsen Indonesia's debt situation, and that they would be put to good use in supporting the government's future focus on social welfare development programs.

"Our indebtedness level in terms of the amount we

borrow and our repayment needs will show no net increase,"he said."Neither will we suffer a widening gap between our debt stock and foreign exchange reserves, which have recently been increasing."

The government says that Indonesia's debt ratio can continue to decline to 42 percent of gross domestic product this year, from 48 percent last year, even if the new debts are to be incurred.

Boediono further said that any grants that were received would be directly disbursed to the public through rural development projects and reconstruction assistance for disaster-hit areas of Yogyakarta and Central Java.

Up to 300,000 join ranks of poor after quake

Agence France Presse - June 16, 2006

Manila — About 300,000 Indonesian survivors were impoverished after a deadly earthquake struck the center of densely populated Java island last month, an Asian Development Bank (ADB) study says.

"The earthquake is estimated to have impoverished an additional 67,000 households and increased the poverty head count ratio by 1.6 percent in the affected areas," the report said.

Aid agencies taking part in the relief effort in Central Java and Yogyakarta provinces have estimated the average household in the area at five persons.

The ADB report said preliminary estimates suggested the reduced economic activity would lead to 130,000 lost jobs, or about four percent of total employment in the affected areas. "Close to 70,000 people may have lost their primary source of income" as a direct result of the quake, it said.

It added that the pace of jobs recovery "will depend on the evolution of the reconstruction effort," noting that the hard-hit areas were "fiscally poor and depend heavily on the central government's general allocation transfer".

The quake is expected to have a "minor effect" on the national economy with a 0.1 percent drop in gross domestic product (GDP), it said, noting that the 11 affected districts combined accounted for just 2.2 percent of Indonesia's GDP.

"The main impact on the national economy is likely to come from the cost of the reconstruction effort and its implications on national government finances," it said. The report said the affected region's economic growth was expected to drop to 1.3 percent this year and 4.2 percent in 2007.

It said the pre-quake gross regional domestic product growth for the affected districts as a whole had been put at 5.5 percent for both 2006 and 2007.