

Skepticism over ‘new’ suspects in Indonesian activist’s murder

Thursday 19 April 2007, by [BALOWSKI James](#) (Date first published: 14 April 2007).

Jakarta,

Indonesian police have named two new suspects in the murder of human rights activist Munir, who died of arsenic poisoning on a Garuda flight from Jakarta to Amsterdam on September 7, 2004.

Following an April 10 cabinet meeting, police chief General Sutanto said that the two were former Garuda Indonesia officials. “They are officials from Garuda with initials IS and R”, Sutanto told reporters at the presidential palace.

The initials match those of Garuda’s former director Indra Setiawan and corporate security vice-president Ramelgia Anwar. Sutanto said that R had issued an assignment letter to pilot Pollycarpus Budihari Priyanto, the only person ever to be charged in the murder case. “The document was issued on orders from his superior, IS”, said Sutanto.

Munir was a staunch critic of Indonesia’s military, accusing it of rights violations in Aceh and Papua and of running a network involved in illegal logging and drug smuggling. His work earned him many enemies among Indonesia’s military and political elite.

In December 2005 a court sentenced Priyanto to 14 years for the murder, noting that he had not acted alone. Priyanto claims to have been recruited by the National Intelligence Agency (BIN) in 2002. The court heard that prior to the murder he made numerous phone calls to the former deputy head of the agency, Muchdi PR. Muchdi — a former elite special forces commander — was sacked following Munir’s investigation into the 1998 abductions of student activists.

In October last year, a Supreme Court verdict cleared Pollycarpus of murder charges, leaving no-one held accountable the murder.

Shortly after being elected president in 2004, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono promised the public — and Munir’s widow, Suciwati — that he would personally ensure a thorough investigation into the case. He even described the murder as a “test case for the nation” and established an officially sanctioned fact finding team (TPF).

In its final report submitted to Yudhoyono in June 2005, the team found evidence that Munir’s death was a “well-planned conspiracy” and named a number of Garuda executives and BIN officials who should be investigated. These recommendations were never used by police or at Priyanto’s trial and Yudhoyono has refused to make them public — even though the investigation’s terms of reference requires this.

Questions have also been raised about whether the “new suspects” are actually new at all, as well as the timing of the announcement.

Legislator Lukman Hakim Syaefuddin, for example, said that while it should become an “entry point”

to crack the case, both suspects had already been recommended for further investigation. "This isn't something new, it has long been recommended by the TPF. These people should have been followed up, but it was not done by the police", Syaefuddin told Detik.com.

Responding to rumours a day before the announcement, Rafendi Djamin from the Human Right Working Group said that the Munir case had become a "pebble in the shoe" for Indonesia's attempts to be re-elected as a member of the UN Human Rights Commission next May. Djamin, who headed an Indonesian delegation to the commission on March 12-30, said that several parties raised the Munir case during the commission's last session.

"UN special rapporteur Philips Alston, in an official report on the Munir case to the UN Human Rights Commission made the evaluation that the Indonesian government has shown a cooperative attitude but it was incomplete", Djamin told the Kompas newspaper. Djamin also suggested that the government should invite Alston to come to Indonesia to review the case.

Speaking with Detik.com on April 11, Suciwati said that while the announcement offers some assurance that the case will be solved, she hoped it was not just another public relations stunt. "I hope that this is not just courtesy. Not just merely to entertain us because up until now it has been as if the investigation has stagnated", said Suciwati.

Dispute this Suciwati said she remains optimistic and will continue to fight for justice until the perpetrators are found. "I must remain optimistic and pressure the police to uncover the mastermind", she said.

P.S.

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