

Indonesia/East Timor News Updates - March 16, 2006

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Three police officers killed in clash with Papua protesters

Sydney Morning Herald - March 16, 2006

Three policemen have been killed in clashes with protesters in Papua demanding the closure of a giant mine run by America's Freeport-McMoran Cooper & Gold Inc. AFP also reported two protesters were killed.

Papuan police spokesman Kartono Wangsadisastro said students from the province's main university pelted policemen with stones to stop them from opening a

roadblock to an airport that serves provincial capital Jayapura.

"Three officers have died. They suffered from injuries from punches and stones," he said, adding police tried to break up the protest by firing teargas and rubber bullets.

On Wednesday, one person was shot by an arrow hours after anti-Freeport protesters tried to storm a five-star hotel in Timika, the nearest town to Freeport's Grasberg mine.

There have been sporadic protests against the Grasberg mine in recent weeks, both in Papua and Jakarta. A road blockade by mostly illegal miners shut down operations for four days last month.

The protesters have been demanding the closure of the lucrative mine, believed to have the world's third-largest copper reserves and one of the biggest gold deposits.

The Freeport operation has been a frequent source of controversy in Indonesia, with issues ranging from its impact on the environment and the share of revenue going to Papuans and the legality of payments to Indonesian security forces who help guard the site.

Illegal miners often enter mining areas in Indonesia, a sprawling archipelago that is the world's fourth most populous country with huge metal deposits such as copper, gold and tin.

Indonesia protesters kill police officers

Agence France Presse - March 16, 2006

Jayapura — Protesters beat three police officers to death Thursday during a violent demonstration to demand the closure of a US-owned gold mine in Indonesia's Papua province, police and witnesses said. At least 19 people were injured in clashes.

Two members of the police paramilitary unit and a regular officer were killed, said Col. Kertono Wangsadisastra.

An Associated Press reporter saw protesters corner two of the officers and beat them with sticks and stones while hundreds demonstrated near a major university in the provincial capital of Jayapura.

Police fired tear gas, wielded batons and chased and attacked several protesters, who threw stones at the approaching officers, an Associated Press reporter at the scene said. At least 19 people were injured, many with gunshot wounds, two hospitals reported.

It was the third day of violent protests against the mine run by the New Orleans-based Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold Inc. "We want Freeport to close because it has not given any benefits to the people of Papua. In fact it's made them suffer," said Kosmos Yual, one of more than 200 protesters.

There have been several rallies in recent weeks against the gold mine — said to be the world's largest — both in Papua and in the Indonesian capital Jakarta.

Freeport, which pays millions of dollars in taxes and funds scores of community projects close to the mine in central Papua, was forced to temporarily shut the facility last month after demonstrators blockaded it.

Papua is home to a popular separatist movement that has been brutally repressed by Indonesian security forces. The mine is often held up by independence supporters as a symbol of the unfair division of resources between the capital and Papua.

Police make arrests for Papua hotel attack

Jakarta Post - March 16, 2006

Nethy Dharma Somba, Jayapura — Mimika Police on Wednesday arrested 15 people for an attack on the Sheraton Timika Hotel in Timika, Papua, on Tuesday, and are searching for five more suspects.

The 15 people arrested were among a group of protesters who have blocked off one of the roads leading to the Freeport gold mine in Timika for the last several days to protest the American mining giant's activities in the province.

During the arrests, two police officers suffered arrow wounds when the suspects attacked them with traditional weapons.

Papua Police spokesman Sr. Comr. Kartono S. told The Jakarta Post on Wednesday the police officers were attacked as they attempted to arrest 20 people suspected of involvement in the hotel attack.

He said police fired warning shots after they came under attack and were able to arrest 15 of the suspects, with the remaining five suspects managing to flee.

"Currently the checkpoint (on the road to the mine) is clear, there are no more residents there and the police are on guard," he said.

He said the 15 suspects were arrested for the attack on the hotel and the possession of dangerous weapons. "They're currently being questioned at Mimika Police Headquarters," Kartono said.

The two wounded police officers are being treated at Mitra Community Hospital in Timika. Hospital deputy director Antonius Darmono said the two officers were admitted about two hours apart with arrow wounds. Darmono told AFP one of the officers underwent emergency surgery to remove an arrow from his chest.

Those responsible for the attack on the Sheraton smashed up four buses and set a car alight. They were expressing their anger over the operations of Freeport. The hotel's guests, including members of the Papua provincial council and the Papuan People's Assembly (MRP), had to be evacuated.

The attack forced the councillors and MRP members to cancel a visit to the Freeport mine to gather information ahead of a planned special session on March 22 to decide Papua's stance on Freeport's operations in the province.

"It's likely there will be no special session because we have no information to discuss because we didn't get to the mine," councillor Abdul Hakim told the Post in Jayapura.

Eleven councillors and 18 MRP members staying at the hotel were on a five-day working visit to Freeport's mines in Tembagapura and Timika in Mimika regency. The trip was to gather information following

widespread protests demanding the closure of Freeport's mines over allegations of environmental damage and complaints that the company's operations failed to benefit Papuans.

"We went to Freeport to gather data following protests demanding Freeport's closure... but we didn't get there because people blocked the road and attacked the Sheraton hotel where we were staying," Abdul said.

In Jayapura, members of the Papua's People Fighting Front, led by Arnold Omba, blocked a road outside Cendrawasih University in Abepura, demanding Freeport's closure and the withdrawal of soldiers deployed to secure the mine.

The protest, which began at noon, completely blocked off the street, causing long traffic jams. The only vehicles allowed to pass were ambulances, and that only after protesters checked to determine whether the vehicles were carrying sick people.

Activists want more details on Rice's visit

Jakarta Post - March 16, 2006

Tiarma Siboro and Muninggar Sri Saraswati, Jakarta — Strong words from human rights activists and grumbles from lawmakers greeted US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on the second day of her two-day visit to the country on Wednesday. Rights activists questioned whether Rice had sought Indonesian support for the signing of a Bilateral Immunity Agreement (BIA) during her trip to Jakarta.

Under the agreement, all American citizens — be they members of the US military corps, diplomats or businesspeople — would enjoy immunity from prosecution by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Activists grouped in the Human Rights Working Group said the government should publicly disclose all it had discussed with Rice during the visit.

The group said if Rice had asked Indonesia to sign a BIA and the government had acquiesced, this would

"endanger our public interests, democracy, justice, and human rights values". "Should the government give the nod to the agreement, we are worried that we (Indonesia) will never ratify the Rome Statute, which is considered a vital foundation for countries once ruled by authoritarian regimes to move toward democracy," Usman Hamid, the coordinator of the National Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence, said. The Rome Statute rules on the establishment of the ICC.

The United States has come under fire worldwide for its failure to respect human rights in its treatment of prisoners of in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay. The US-led invasion into Iraq has also drawn condemnation and protest from international rights groups, which have demanded the superpower withdraw its troops.

The immunity agreements are apparently aimed at ensuring American troops are shielded from possible prosecutions in the ICC over the Iraq invasion.

Separately, dozens of legislators refused to attend a meeting hosted Wednesday by the Indonesian Council on World Affairs, which featured Rice as the keynote speaker, in protest against what they said was "ambiguous" US foreign policy. Only 10 out of 40 legislators invited to the event showed up.

"The US only gives empty promises to Indonesia. They promised to supply military spare parts and equipment (to Indonesia) last year, but to date this has not materialized," said legislator Djoko Susilo of the National Mandate Party (PAN), who was among those who boycotted the meeting.

Another legislator, Permadi of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle said he did not attend the event because "I don't want to listen to a US lecture about democracy."

Several legislators who attended, meanwhile, were dissatisfied with how the event was run. House of Representatives deputy speaker A.M. Fatwa criticized the heavy security measures at the venue and complained about the seating detail, which put him in the last row.

"I was told to arrive at 7.30. After the lengthy procedures, it turned out that she (Rice) didn't come until two hours later. This is too much," he said.

Rights groups blast Rice for defending military ties

Associated Press - March 15, 2006

Jakarta — Human rights groups criticized US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Wednesday for restoring full military ties with Indonesia, saying the army remains a threat to the country's young democracy.

"The (Indonesian armed forces) remains a largely rogue institution which commits human rights violations without concern for the law," said a statement issued jointly in Washington D.C. by four nongovernmental groups.

The military was the main pillar of the 32-year dictatorship of former strongman Suharto, who was ousted amid massive pro-democracy street protests in 1998.

The United States cut all military ties with Indonesia the next year after the army and its militia proxies devastated East Timor during its break from Jakarta.

Last November, however, Rice waived all restrictions on military assistance, citing cooperation by the world's largest majority Muslim nation in the war on terror.

Washington said that continuing to isolate the Indonesian military was no longer in its strategic interest.

"The administration's abandonment of congressionally imposed restrictions... rewards and encourages continued human rights violations, impunity, and corruption, thus undermining Indonesian democracy," the statement said.

Golkar first to back independent candidates in Aceh

Jakarta Post - March 16, 2006

Muninggar Sri Saraswati, Jakarta — The Golkar Party, the biggest faction in the House of Representatives, has led the way in declaring its support for independent candidates to contest direct elections in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam.

The stance was revealed in a hearing Wednesday, during which all factions unanimously expressed their agreement to continue the deliberation of the bill on the governance of Aceh.

Led by legislator Ferry Mursyidan Baldan, the session was also attended by Information Minister Sofyan A. Djalil, Home Minister M. Ma'ruf and Deputy Chairperson of the Regional Representatives Council, Sri Kadarwati.

Speaking on behalf of Golkar, legislator Abdul Gafur told the hearing that independent candidates should be seen as a form of affirmative action, which would accommodate the participation of all Acehnese groups in politics.

"Independents will be a type of affirmative action that can ensure the participation of all Acehnese elements in politics, while local political parties have yet to be established," he said.

However, Golkar proposed that they should only be able to run as independents, if supported by 3 percent of the overall population in Aceh, the same requirement applied to political parties.

With 126 of 550 seats in the House, the Golkar Party is the largest faction and is considered to be pro-administration. It is now led by Jusuf Kalla, who is the vice president and one of the key architects behind the August 2005 peace pact between the government and the then Free Aceh Movement (GAM), which ended over 30 years of conflict in the province.

The National Mandate Party (PAN), the United Development Party (PPP), the National Awakening Party (PKB) and the Democrat Party also offered full support for further deliberation of the bill.

"The bill will ensure the protection of people with differing views in the country. We don't take the position that some people have, who say the bill would prompt other provinces to separate from Indonesia," legislator Sayuti Asyatri of PAN said.

Democrat legislator Teuku Rifky Harsya said it was time for the country to allow Aceh to exercise its rights as past governments had been very "centralistic" while applying top-down approaches in the province.

Golkar said it was also ready to allow an allocation of natural resources-based revenue, which is more than the 3 percent proposed in the bill. "We understand that the Acehnese need more money to build the province, particularly after the tsunami," Abdul Gafur said.

However, Golkar raised its opposition to the possible establishment of a human rights tribunal in Aceh. "We shall not root out something that has been happened in the past," the legislator said.

The Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) maintained its stance to reject the truce, but announced that it was ready to deliberate the bill for the sake of the Acehnese.

"We don't reject peace in Aceh, we only expect a lasting peace and prosperity for the Acehnese. They don't need an empty promise," legislator Sutjipto said.

PDI-P rejected a clause in the bill that requires the House to get approval from the Aceh legislative council if the national legislature issues a policy involving Aceh.

The special committee deliberating the bill is set to meet Maj. Gen. Bambang Darmono, who represents Indonesia in the EU-led Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM).

During the peace talks in Helsinki last year GAM dropped its demand of total independence in return for a form of self-governance within the context of the Republic of Indonesia.

Some parties, including former president Megawati Soekarnoputri and her PDI-P, the military and the police retired officer groups, as well as former president Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid have opposed the bill, saying they fear a possible separation of Aceh from Indonesia.

Aid group suspends some tsunami operations

Associated Press - March 16, 2006

Chris Brummitt, Jakarta — International aid group Oxfam has suspended some of its tsunami-relief operations in hard-hit Aceh province while it investigates suspected financial irregularities there, a spokesman said Thursday.

Relief organizations in Indonesia have pledged to carefully audit their funds amid concerns that aid dollars could be stolen by corrupt officials or contractors in the country, which is rated as one of the world's most graft ridden.

Oxfam spokesman Douglas Keatinge said investigators were probing irregularities involving "tens of thousands of dollars" at one project office covering the provincial capital Banda Aceh and surrounding districts. He gave no more details on the nature of the irregularities.

"Oxfam has taken the decision to temporarily suspend part of our operational activities in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar while our auditors thoroughly review the issue," he said.

He said that essential services such as water trucking and rubbish collection would continue, but other activities, including house building and job creation schemes, would be put on hold in the region, which was worst hit by the Dec. 26 tsunami. Oxfam's overall budget for Aceh is \$30 million.

Its early disclosure about the irregularities is unusual for an international aid organization, and highlights the pressure relief groups are under to be transparent about how funds are spent.

"Oxfam is committed to upholding the strictest and most rigorous financial controls," Keatinge said. "The temporary suspension of our operations will allow us to be more accountable to the communities that we work with, and ensure improved service delivery in the future."

The tsunami, triggered by a massive earthquake close to Indonesia's Sumatra Island, killed or left missing

at least 216,000 people in 11 Indian Ocean nations, more than half of them in Aceh.

The scale of the death and destruction generated some \$13 billion in aid, the most generous global response ever to a natural disaster.

Some corruption during major relief efforts is inevitable, experts say, but Indonesia has been praised for limiting graft in Aceh, chiefly by establishing a government agency to oversee the reconstruction process headed by a respected former Cabinet minister.

Government states porn bill must target materials

Jakarta Post - March 16, 2006

Jakarta/Denpasar/Surakarta — The government made its position clear on the pornography bill on Wednesday, stating the focus should be on limiting distribution of obscene materials instead of criminalizing personal conduct, particularly of women.

"The government believes the eventual anti-porn law should be effective in protecting the nation from excessive exposure to pornographic material, thus it should touch more on how to regulate its distribution," State Minister for Women's Empowerment Meutia Hatta Swasono said after accompanying President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in a meeting with the National Commission on Violence Against Women.

The special House committee deliberating the bill recently said the vague definitions, particularly defining "obscene" conduct, would be scrapped.

The bill has been criticized for imperiling the rights of women, already under pressure from the introduction of sharia regulations on dress and public conduct in scattered areas of the country.

"We also ask... that women are treated fairly, it's as if they are blamed by the way they dress," Meutia said, in a rare reinforcement of the government's stated policies toward equal treatment of women.

The minister said limiting the distribution of materials considered obscene was essential to

protecting minors from exposure to potentially harmful images.

The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle has been most vocal in its opposition to the bill, sharing the stance of women's groups and the arts community.

In contrast, the Prosperous Justice Party is among the few parties left in pushing for retention of the contentious articles. The Islamic-oriented party says the Criminal Code is inadequate in protecting minors and in preventing what it considers the country's increasing moral degradation.

The bill's proponents also dismiss claims that it presents a monolithic value system for multicultural Indonesia, and argue opponents ignore the aim of the "greater good" of preventing sexual exploitation and immorality.

On Wednesday, Bali Governor Dewa Made Beratha and council speaker IBP Wesnawa stated their official rejection of the bill and its deliberation. Artists and activists have protested a number of times in the province, including in a noisy, crowded hearing and plenary session at the provincial legislative council on Wednesday.

The governor said the future law "might put Balinese cultural heritage and sacred religious objects in danger of legal prosecution".

The governor was angered by the pursuance of a legal grievance from a Muslim organization, the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, who accused him as showing separatist tendencies in his opposition to the bill.

In the Central Java town of Surakarta, at least 1,000 artists, students and activists protested the bill, with about 500 tayub traditional dancers joining the parade.

Murtdijono, the organizer and head of the Central Java Cultural Center, feared the passage of the bill into law would lead to moral crusaders patrolling the streets unhindered.

"Members of militant groups will feel they have legal grounds to act as they like toward artists and their works due to a one sided interpretation, at a time when law enforcement is very weak," he said.

'Bill sees women as sources of sin'

Jakarta Post - March 16, 2006

The pornography bill has drawn controversy because it bans a number of acts, including kissing in public, and could punish people for the way they dress. The Jakarta Post asked people in the city for their thoughts on the issue.

Anny R. Gultom, 58, is a housewife. She lives in Cempaka Putih, Central Jakarta: As a mother of five and grandmother of three, of course, I support the pornography bill and any regulation that can guarantee a better future for the next generation.

Racy TV programs, magazines and tabloids are a negative influence. Children should not be exposed to such materials until they fully understand what it is that they are seeing.

There is a fine line between pornography and art. Some of the traditions we have could also be challenged if the bill is passed.

How about women who wear kemben (bustier-like Javanese traditional garment)? I think that, as good parents, we should instill values in our children to prepare them for the road ahead. They are bound to come across different ways of thinking about pornography. So, they need to have a solid point of reference.

Husein Buntara, 56, is an entrepreneur. He lives in Glodok, West Jakarta: Why bother to make a new law on pornography? We already have a good one — it's just that it's not being properly enforced.

I think the pornography bill degrades women and denies them freedom of expression. Dancing or dressing up could put them behind bars.

Utari, 29, is a freelance translator. She lives in Depok: As a woman, I am strongly against the pornography bill. Women are seen as sources of sin, as if God created women to bring depravity to the world.

To eradicate pornography, the government should

restrict access to it. For example, children should not be allowed to buy adult magazines and movies with content of a sexual nature should be screened late at night. It is our responsibility to monitor what our children grow up with.

Balinese reiterate opposition to pornography bill

Jakarta Post - March 16, 2006

I Wayan Juniarta, Denpasar — The room fell into an uneasy silence as Satria Naradha, one of the most influential community figures in Bali, made a point to the visiting members of the House of Representative's special committee on the pornography bill.

"Bali will never betray Indonesia, we will never secede. Instead, we shall fight until the end any group that is trying to subvert the nation into a monolithic society based on the teachings of one single religious belief," he stressed. "If Jakarta and Aceh want to betray the republic (by suppressing religious freedom and multiculturalism) then we will let them go (from the republic). Bali will not go away, we will fight to keep this nation as a nation that respects religious freedom and celebrates multiculturalism," he said.

Satria's remarks were obviously aimed at the pornography bill, a controversial document the visiting legislators tried in vain to sell to the Balinese.

The visiting legislators were obviously a bit shocked by the statement. So far, Satria's remarks were the most pointed political position they had heard during their three-day visit to Bali in early March.

The fact that the remarks were made by a man who owns the influential Bali Post and Bali TV made them politically impossible to ignore.

Born into a family of heroes — his mother was a veteran of the War of Independence and his father was one of the country's first newspaper publishers — Satria has become the living embodiment of the contemporary Balinese's struggle to win the modern world without losing their traditional cultural and

religious identity.

A main proponent of the Ajeg Bali, a cultural and economic movement aimed at creating a Balinese-style renaissance, Satria's influence extends beyond the modern wall of Denpasar. He commands deep respect in the island's rural areas and numerous Balinese communities outside Bali.

His remarks also reflect the substantial paradigm shift that has taken place recently among various opponents to the bill on the island.

"Previously, many of us viewed the bill as a threat to our interests, either to our tourist industry or cultural freedom. Nowadays, the majority of us see the bill as a grave threat to the interests of our nation," a scholar, Ketut Sumarta, said.

Opponents believe the bill's rigid and gender-insensitive interpretation on pornography and its ignorance of the nation's colorful cultural and religious heritage would inflict irreversible damage on the fragile uniting fabric of the nation.

"Indonesia is a nation in waiting. We spent decades to nurture the spirit of nationhood among hundreds of the country's ethnic and cultural groups. The bill will damage that spirit and send this nation to the edge of disintegration," Sumarta warned.

Separately, the chairman of the main movement opposed to the bill, Komponen Rakyat Bali, I Gusti Ngurah Harta, reminded that the unitary state of Indonesia was founded on the noble principles of Pancasila and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity), which reflected the founding fathers' utmost respect for the nation's diverse sociocultural landscape.

"The bill, on the other hand, reflects and promotes the moral and cultural values of only one group of religious beliefs," he said.

The paradigm shift has convinced the Balinese that the struggle against the bill is no longer a selfish effort to save the island's tourist industry or cultural heritage, but an altruistic endeavor to save the Republic of Indonesia.

"The struggle has been taken to another level, a nobler one," Sumarta said. "We will intensify our contacts with other regions in Indonesia, such as

Papua and Yogya, to form a nationalistic coalition to fight the bill," Ngurah Harta added.

Satria Naradha views this as a patriotic struggle. "My ancestors sacrificed their lives to build this republic. I and my fellow Balinese will not let this sacred heritage be ruined by a small group of people who want to impose their moral values on this nation," he said.

At the end of the meeting, Satria once again shocked the legislators by presenting them with unique gifts — red-and-white flags of the Republic of Indonesia; a symbolic gesture. "May these flags always remind you of what this republic really stands for," he said.

Labor Law revisions protect employers at cost of workers

Jakarta Post - March 16, 2006

Ridwan Max Sijabat, Jakarta — It is pretty easy to imagine what will happen to workers and their families if the House of Representatives and the government endorse amendments to the 2003 Labor Law allowing companies to outsource not only additional and/or temporary work, but also their core businesses, and to recruit contract-based employees.

Workers will be paid less and they will likely lose most of the benefits they currently enjoy under the unamended law, including meal and transportation allowances and social security programs. Remuneration will be determined not by the companies that actually employ workers, but by the companies that recruit them.

Professionals will compete with expatriates for the highest pay, skilled workers will seek jobs that provide compensation in line with their skills, while unskilled workers, who make up the majority of the country's workforce, will have absolutely no bargaining power.

Contract workers will no doubt see their rights and benefits disappear, under contracts written up by employers who will naturally look after their own

interests first. Besides receiving no bonuses, allowances for transportation, leave or health, or vacation, workers are likely to be denied raises and will have nowhere to turn in demanding improvements in their working conditions.

Employers will hold all the power over contract workers, being able simply to decide not to extend the contracts for any reason.

The current law allows employers to outsource only a part of their work to other companies, while the core business must be done by permanent workers. It also allows employers to extend labor contracts twice, with the hope that contract workers will eventually be promoted to permanent staff.

The government and the Indonesian Employers Association have proposed about 50 changes to the employment system in what they call an attempt to repair the investment climate in the country and attract more foreign investment.

Other proposed changes include the elimination of service payments and a maximum limit on severance pay for dismissed workers of three months' salary. Currently, employers pay a maximum of 14 months' salary and severance payments for fired workers.

If the Labor Law is amended, fired workers and their families will be powerless. The issue of severance pay has been one of the most contentious during deliberations of the proposed amendments by the House and the government, pitting labor unions against employers. Labor unions so far seem to have the support of the legislature in blocking any amendments that would make it too easy for employers to dismiss workers.

The proposed amendments would certainly make it easier for investors to do business here, but in the end the changes could be counterproductive.

Outsourcing could affect worker productivity and loyalty. Poor working conditions will discourage workers from doing their best to help the companies employing them. Employees will have no loyalty because they will have "two masters" — their recruiters and their employers.

The proposed revisions to the law will also affect the industrial relations system, which now sees

employers and workers as partners. There will also be no room for the two sides to reach collective labor agreements where they establish their own rights and obligations.

Making matters worse, labor unions and analysts are skeptical the proposed amendments can improve the investment climate and smooth the way for foreign investors entering Indonesia. They have warned of social and political instability if the 27 million workers employed in the formal sector take to the streets to oppose the amendments, as some 3,000 steel workers did recently.

Critics say the government remains ignorant of the true problems discouraging foreign investment here. They say the government should take a close look at the way it has treated potential investors, and evaluate the security situation in the country over the last seven years.

Complicated bureaucratic procedures have made it costly and time consuming for investors to obtain the necessary documents to set up companies. Corruption and double taxation by the central and regional governments of foreign investors further burden businesses, adding to their production costs. And a lack of legal certainty frightens off investors from expanding their businesses in the country.

Of course, deregulation is necessary. The law must absolutely be enforced and security must be ensured for the sake of certainty for investors. Clean governance and security guarantees are two of the main conditions for making investors feel at home.

Indonesia should learn from China, which has successfully deregulated industry, maintained security and repaired its infrastructure to attract foreign investors.

[The author is a staff writer at The Jakarta Post.]

Pro-government figures stack 'TVRI' supervisory board

Jakarta Post - March 16, 2006

Jakarta — Opposition lawmakers and the independent

Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI) doubted Wednesday whether the new supervisory board members of state broadcaster TVRI would be able to stay neutral doing their jobs.

House of Representatives legislators selected Musa Asy'airie, Retno Intani, Hazairin Sitepu, Abraham Isnan, and Brig. Gen. (ret) Robik Mukav as supervisor board members for TVRI after a two-day fit-and-proper test for 14 candidates fielded by the Communications and Information Ministry.

Sitepu and Mukav were both members of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's campaign team in the 2004 presidential elections. Two others, Retno and Abraham, were from TVRI, while Musa was a government representative.

The board would be authorized to determine TVRI's general policies and to monitor the implementation of TVRI's work plan and budgetary spending. The board would also have the authority to select, appoint and fire the members of TVRI's board of directors.

The newly appointed board members face tough challenges; to fight rampant corruption and restructure the disorganized management of the public broadcasting agency. They are also supposed to ensure the station does not become a government mouthpiece, as it has been in the past.

In a report in October last year, Indonesian Corruption Watch reported the management of the 43-year-old television network to the Corruption Eradication Commission. The group's report detailed an alleged Rp 15 billion markup in procurement projects, TVRI's inconsistencies in reporting its advertising revenue and other "unusual" balance sheet items.

Some legislators said they were not impressed by the 14 candidates proposed by the government. "Very few are actually qualified for the job," National Awakening Party legislator Muhammad A.S. Hikam told The Jakarta Post. Hikam said corruption was responsible for TVRI's poor performance and had become a "moral hazard" within the broadcaster, spreading throughout its staff.

KPI head Sinansari Ecip said that with the appointment of the five board members, TVRI would again become a mouthpiece of the government. "The

board does not represent the public, but it represents the government," he said. The government should have coordinated with the KPI in the selection of candidates, he said.

'Suspicious' offer from House Speaker

Jakarta Post - March 16, 2006

Jakarta — Lawmakers slammed Wednesday an invitation by from House Speaker Agung Laksono for legislators to participate in a launch of budget airline AdamAir's new flights in Singapore.

"(Participating in the event) could constitute a conflict of interest," House transportation commission member Afni Ahmad of the National Mandate Party said Wednesday.

Agung, who is AdamAir's commissioner, should publicly explain why he had invited House members to the launch in his capacity as speaker, Afni said.

AdamAir was recently brought to the attention of the House's transportation commission after one of its aircraft was lost in the air for two hours last month and had to make an emergency landing in Tambolaka, East Nusa Tenggara.

An investigation into the incident has not yet been released. Commission chairman Ahmad Muqawwam said Agung had opened himself to allegations of abuse of power by inviting lawmakers to the ceremony in his capacity as House speaker.

"It wouldn't be a problem if he invited us in his capacity as AdamAir's commissioner," Ahmad said.

Poso robbers linked to religious attacks

Jakarta Post - March 16, 2006

Ruslan Sangadji, Poso/Jakarta — Seven suspects recently detained in connection with several armed robberies in Poso, Central Sulawesi, were also

believed to be involved in a series of religiously motivated attacks in the region, police said Wednesday.

Police said the suspects' links with the Islamic terror group led by the country's most wanted man, Noordin M. Top, were still being investigated.

Six of the men were arrested on March 6 and 8 before their alleged leader, Andi Makassau, also known as Aan, was caught by the special counterterror squad Detachment-88 on March 10.

Aan is believed to have masterminded several armed robberies to fund terror attacks. Police said members of the group believed their attacks were fa'i, or legal, because they were committed against the enemies of Islam.

Police said Aan was also believed to be involved in attacks on a Poso market in November 2004 and the Tentena market in May 2005.

"We suspect Aan's group is connected with Noordin because the loot from the robberies was allegedly used to finance several terror acts, but we are still investigating this," Central Sulawesi Police spokesmen Adj. Sr. Comr. Rais D. Adam said.

Police investigator Sr. Comr Didi Rochyadi told the detikcom news portal that Aan had "ordered the six men to save 15 percent of their loot for a fa'i operation".

Police were also questioning the seven in connection with the bombing of a Hindu temple in Poso on March 10, which injured one person, and a bomb attack on the Mahesa market in December last year, which killed seven people and injured 56.

During the arrest of Aan and his followers, police confiscated two revolvers and dozens of rounds of 38-caliber ammunition.

They also seized two Mobile Brigade police uniforms, which they said may have been used by Aan's group in its operations.

In Jakarta, National Police spokesmen Brig. Gen. Anton Bachrul Alam said the evidence connecting the seven men with terror attacks in Central Sulawesi was mounting.

"We cannot reveal all the information we have, but we are certainly collecting as much data as we can from the members of these groups who have been arrested," he said.

Horta 'saddened' by upholding of jail term on militia boss

Lusa - March 15, 2006

Coimbra, Portugal — East Timor's foreign minister says that he is "very saddened" at the decision by Indonesia's top court this week to reinstate a 10-year jail term on former pro-Jakarta militia chief Eurico Guterres.

"I am very sad because again it is a Timorese who is paying for all the others", Josi Ramos Horta told an audience of students and teachers at Portugal's prestigious Coimbra University on Tuesday.

Guterres, ethnically East Timorese and ex-leader of the notorious Aitarak militia, was given a 10-year prison term by an ad hoc Jakarta court for war crimes committed in Timor around the time of Dili's 1999 independence vote.

His jail term was halved on appeal in 2003, but reinstated Monday by the Indonesian Supreme Court.

He has remained at liberty in West Timor since his original sentencing and is reported as having being elected as a regional leader of one of Indonesia's main political forces.

The ex-Aitarak boss is one of only two among 18 people, both East Timorese, indicted by the Jakarta ad hoc court to have had their convictions upheld.

"I run the risk of being criticized in Timor by NGOs and by Amnesty International, but this is my sincere and genuine opinion", said Ramos Horta on his unease at the prison term handed down to Guterres.

Ramos Horta, who observers say could either enter the race to become the UN's new secretary general or stand for election as his country's president next year, also called for the Dili Parliament to consider an amnesty for convicted and imprisoned Timorese

militiamen.

"If it is not possible to punish the true culprits — the Indonesian military — why should Timorese militiamen be tried and sentenced?" asked Ramos Horta.

More than 6% growth needed to reach development goals - Alkatiri

Lusa - March 15, 2006

Dili — East Timor's economy needs to grow by more than 6% annually from 2007 if the new nation is to meet the UN's Millennium Development Goals by 2015, Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri said Wednesday.

At a briefing on the findings of the latest visit to Timor by officials from the International Monetary Fund, Alkatiri said his government hoped to achieve the required GDP expansion through sustained social and economic growth.

Boosted private and public investment will fuel growth in coming years, said Alkatiri, adding that public spending in the next state budget, coming into force June 1, would reach a total USD 70 million compared to USD 8 million in the current financial year.

The Dili government's budget plan is still under preparation, said Alkatiri, adding that the proposals forecast expenditure of over USD 200 million.

Budget support from Timor's donor community will be reduced in next year's fiscal blueprint, as in previous years, and this international assistance will drop to only USD 10 million in the 2007 budget, said Alaktiri.

A crucial factor to the success, or otherwise, of Dili's future macroeconomic performance and targets will be the quality of work and services provided by national firms contracted to build infrastructure projects, the Timorese leader concluded.

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F-FDTL members will not join PNTL

Minister of Interior Rogerio Lobato has rejected the rumour that the more than 600 expelled F-FDTL soldiers will join the PNTL, and has asked the public to stop believing this rumour. Speaking to journalists at his office on Tuesday, Rogerio stated that if someone is not serving in the F-FDTL then automatically they will not serve in the PNTL. He said that it is very important that the media do not take up the rumour, which will only contribute to further confusion, as the policy of the Minister of Interior is clear. He explained that the soldiers have the right to leave the F-FDTL, but when conducting recruitment the PNTL will be sure to take note if any of those names appear in enrollment. (DN, STL, TP)

Discrimination by president of NP: Sabino

Head of the PD Bench in the National Parliament Mariano Sabino has complained that the President of the Plenary Session in the National Parliament has discriminated against the PD Bench by cancelling the presentation of a report from the Quelicai Sub-district branch of PD. Coordinator of the branch, Agapito Ribeiro, Cabral was to read the report in yesterday's plenary session, the objective of which was to refute claims by the village and sub-village chief that PD had raised its flag in their village without first informing the local community leaders. According to Sabino, the President of the Parliament is its spokesperson and the one who should facilitate the work of the Parliament by allowing the MPs to speak, as they are instruments of information. He stated that by limiting the opportunities for MPs to speak, the Parliament is also preventing the people's wishes from being voiced. (TP)

PMD will fight to include gender program in curriculum

The Millennium Democratic Party (PMD) has stated that it will fight to include gender teachings in the

school curriculum, to be taught at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, and also to become a factor inherent in all institutions.

According to a press release issued on Tuesday, PMD wishes to respond to the current reality by advancing a change in Timor-Leste society. PMD has established a 35 percent quota for women candidates for the legislature, in support of women's involvement in politics. PMD considers women's rights to be fundamental, and they will continue to facilitate and promote Timorese women via training and capacity building. They maintain however that women who are to become involved in politics must be well trained, and able to problem-solve to become good leaders. (TP)

UNDP politicizes poverty in Timor

Head of ASDT party bench, Feliciano de Fatima Alves also known as Mausiri, stated that UNDP report on poverty in TL tended to politicize rather than describing the reality of this country. It was acknowledged that the people of Timor-Leste had faced a very difficult situation after the referendum in 1999, however, after the establishment of the transitional Government under the UN the situation was neutralized and back to normal. "We are indeed poor, but we don't live under the poverty line. This is proven by the fact that the people still live in healthy conditions and no one is thin due to malnutrition. In front of the shops and streets we don't find beggars as you find in other countries in the world," Alves said. (STL)

Community considers police as enemy

Members of the community in Balide have complained that an operation carried out by members of the police on Sunday night did not follow standard procedures. According to the people in the area, police detained youths at random when a fight erupted between two groups, Rumbia Kaikoli and Rebal Mascarenhas. PNTL Commander, Paulo Martins said he himself received complaints saying the police actions were excessive because the community considers police the enemy. He said that some members of the community pelted the police when they arrived in the area. "If police are considered the enemy, then imagine if the police did not turn up. What would have happened? Now the police show up and the people start throwing rocks at the police car. How can it be?" Martins asked.

According to Timor Post, the incident left two houses damaged after a police officer supported the group Rebal in damaging the house of a member of one of the rival groups. The owner of the house said that although her son was involved, the police should have just detained him rather than helping to destroy her house. In the meantime, PNTL Commander Martins said he has met with the two women who have claimed to have suffered damage to their properties abetted by the police during the melee. Martins added that if the investigation proves any members of the police behaved as accused, measures will be taken according to the police disciplinary regulations. (TP)