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Contents

- [NEWS & ISSUES](#)
- [ACEH](#)
- [WEST PAPUA](#)
- [MILITARY TIES](#)
- [POPULAR RESISTANCE](#)
- [HUMAN RIGHTS/LAW](#)
- [LABOUR ISSUES](#)
- [WAR ON TERROR](#)
- [GOVERNMENT/CIVIL SERVICE](#)
- [ENVIRONMENT](#)
- [HEALTH & EDUCATION](#)
- [OPINION & ANALYSIS](#)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

NEWS & ISSUES

- * Parties debate electoral bar
- * 'Ojek' drivers call for legal recognition
- * Forum slams IMF 'legitimacy problems'
- * Indonesia's Suharto looks healthy at wedding
- * Anti-IMF forum dismisses threats
- * Foreign NGOs get police approval for Batam gathering
- * Trash slides a daily risk for scavengers
- * Police confusion leaves NGO meet in Batam up in the air
- * Search for dump slide victims called off
- * Search for dump slide victims continues
- * Police rapped for banning NGO gathering in Batam

ACEH

- * Study suggests change needed in Aceh rebuilding authority
- * Two BRR officials named suspects in corruption case
- * Aceh revenues soar but poverty remains
- * Aceh survivors slam agency over 'broken promises'

WEST PAPUA

- * Three Abepura defendants jailed
- * AJI concerned about the expel of Australian Journalists
- * Abepura defendants get five years
- * Papuan defendants on hunger strike
- * Five Australian journalists deported from Papua
- * Papuans protest testimony from FBI

MILITARY TIES

- * Gus Dur denies lobbying US over military ties
- * Rights activists question BIN over US lobbying case

POPULAR RESISTANCE

- * Kupang students stage rally
- * PLN customers protest over outrages in Mataram

HUMAN RIGHTS/LAW

- * Women call for rethinking of Islamic dogma
- * Munir case still open, but police not hopeful
- * Student could face six years for insulting President
- * Government still mulling Tommy Soeharto's release
- * Police vow to speed up probe into Munir's murder

* Powerless commission courting politicians

* Munir's family demands new probe

LABOUR ISSUES

* Hotel workers rally around colleagues

* Workers demand minimum wage

* ABM demands standardisation of national wage

* Workers Challenge Alliance threatens to hold national strike

* ABM protests against new forms of colonialism

* Government looks to create 15 million jobs

WAR ON TERROR

* Former JI leader warns of new terror attacks this year

* Another killed in Poso blast

GOVERNMENT/CIVIL SERVICE

* Lawmakers oppose rice imports

* Country better under Yudhoyono: Survey

* 'Bureaucracy, parties striving for recentralization'

ENVIRONMENT

* More muddy misery in Sidoarjo

* Green groups worry about tests' longevity

* Jakarta talks tough on environment

* Fifty major loggers free abroad

* Sand quarrying raises tempers, damages locality

* Official demands Lapindo stop dumping mud in river

* Paranormals called in to end mudflow

* Lapindo dumps water into river: Observers say

HEALTH & EDUCATION

* Teachers claim intimidation for disclosing exam fraud

* Bogor students protest fee increases

OPINION & ANALYSIS

* Welcoming Ramadhan with love

* Prosecuting the prosecutors

NEWS & ISSUES

Parties debate electoral bar

Jakarta Post - September 16, 2006

M. Taufiqurrahman, Jakarta — Leaders of small political parties are fiercely objecting to a plan to increase the electoral threshold from 3 percent to 5 percent. The move is part of a draft amendment to the electoral law.

Chairman of the newly-renamed Muslim-based Star Crescent Party (PBB) Malam Sambat Ka'ban and chairman of the Christian-oriented Prosperous Peace Party (PDS) Denny Tewu said raising the electoral threshold would deny the public the chance to choose from a wide political spectrum.

"Freedom of speech and association is guaranteed by the state constitution, so there is no need to put a limitation on that through an electoral threshold," Ka'ban, who is also Forestry Minister, said Friday.

Tewu suggested that instead of determining electoral eligibility based on how many seats political parties secured at the House, all parties that got seats for legislatures at all levels should be allowed to contest the coming election.

He said that raising the bar by 2 percent would result in the dissolution of some political parties that had in fact gained popularity among the public.

"It will also mean a waste of the government's money as, in our case, we received more than Rp 400 billion over five years as assistance from the government," Tewu said.

Both the PBB and the PDS failed to meet the electoral threshold of 3 percent of seats at the House of Representatives for the 2004 election. The PBB, formerly known as the Crescent Star Party, got only 10 seats in the House, forcing it to build a coalition with other small parties in the legislature just to stay in existence.

In the 2004 legislative election, the PDS got 12 seats at the House and garnered 2.13 percent of the popular vote.

The electoral-threshold system was first enacted after the 1999 general election. Only political parties that garnered 2 percent of the seats at the House were eligible to contest the 2004 election.

A 2003 law passed to serve as foundation for the 2004 legislative elections raised the bar, stating that only parties that claimed 3 percent of the DPR seats could contest the 2009 elections.

To simplify polling procedures, lawmakers will likely increase the electoral threshold to five percent for the 2014 elections.

Senior Golkar party lawmaker Ferry Mursidan Baldan said the application of the electoral threshold principle was in fact one of many ways to improve the functioning of democracy.

"Parties which fail to meet the electoral threshold will not be ordered to shut down, they will only be blocked from taking part in elections, meaning that they have to consolidate more," said Ferry, who served as chairman of the House special committee tasked with deliberating the 2003 law.

He said that failure to meet the threshold did not spell the end for a political party since it could still merge with other parties or simply change its name.

'Ojek' drivers call for legal recognition

Jakarta Post - September 14, 2006

Jakarta — They are everywhere, the men in helmets sitting on motorcycles at the side of the road; waiting and watching day in and day out.

Most Jakartans are familiar with the inexpensive motorcycle taxi known as the ojek but few fully understand the important role the drivers play or the risks they take on Jakarta's dangerous streets.

"They are everywhere. We can count on them as informal police agents," Jakarta Police representative First Insp. Baradun said on the sidelines of the second anniversary of the Jakarta-based Indonesian Motorized Ojek Association (Poms) on Monday. "They often share information related to crimes in the city with us," he said

In this crime-ridden city, the ubiquitous ojek drivers' information is very much needed. They are the police's best informants, reporting fires and street crime.

Poms executive John Kornelis said ojek drivers across the country not only take people where they need to go, "they also deal with street accidents and street crimes". "In fact, the discovery of a terrorist hideout in Batu, Malang, East Java, where one of the Bali bombing masterminds, Azahari, was shot dead, was due to an ojek driver's tip to the police," John said.

Poms chairman Frans Andi Tumengkol called on the police to help ojek drivers in getting legal protection because, he said, the police needed their assistance to secure the community.

Frans said the question of "who will be responsible if ojek drivers are dealing with robbery and theft when they are doing their job" needed to be addressed. "Ojek drivers also face the usual problems faced by any mass transportation operator, but we don't have any access to legal rights," John said. Ojek drivers used the event to call for legal recognition and protection.

Forty-six-year-old ojek driver Ujang said he expected the administration to provide legal recognition for the industry.

The Organization of Land Transportation Owners

(Organda) and the Jakarta Transportation Agency do not recognize motorcycle taxis as public transportation because ojek do not have specific routes or safety standards for drivers and passengers.

If legally recognized, John said, ojek could become a professional and safe mass transportation service. "We are asking the authorities (for) direction to improve ourselves," he said.

According to Ponsi's latest data, there are more than 5 million ojek drivers in the city, although only 10,000 are Ponsi members.

Ojek became an alternative form of public transportation in the city when the local government banned becak (pedicabs) in 1994. The 1997 economic crisis swelled the ranks of ojek drivers, with many of the millions left unemployed turning to their motorcycles to make a living.

House of Representatives Commission V overseeing transportation member Roestanto Wahidi said the commission was considering making ojek an official form of public transportation under the next transportation law.

"We realize that ojek have the same function as other transportation models: serving the public. So they also need legal protection guaranteeing their position in the face of the law," said Roestanto, who also attended Monday's event.

He added that if ojek were to made legal, drivers would have to improve their safety standards and follow traffic regulations.

Forum slams IMF 'legitimacy problems'

Jakarta Post - September 16, 2006

Andi Haswidi, Batam — Only the rich nations that are not affected by IMF policies benefit from the institution's reforms, a speaker at Batam's International Peoples Forum said Friday.

Walden Bello, a professor of sociology and political economy from the University of the

Philippines, said that the IMF had been suffering legitimacy problems ever since its failure to deal with the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

Since then, the agency's big debtors like Brazil, Argentina and Thailand had paid off their debts to the body as quickly as possible, so they could regain their financial sovereignty, he said.

"The crisis of legitimacy is translating into a budgetary crisis for the IMF because developing countries are refusing to gain more debt from it," he said. Bello said total lending by IMF had decreased significantly since 2005 and the decline would likely continue until 2009.

The question of the IMF's legitimacy was also felt throughout Europe where many protests have been held, urging the European governments to back away from funding the body because it had failed to cope with global poverty.

This week, a protest in London succeeded in ensuring the United Kingdom withheld some 50 million pounds of funding from the body.

"With respect to this reform agenda, the real winner of this so-called effort to change the (IMF) voting share depending on GDP is the US," Bello said. The United States, as the biggest funder of the institution, is the largest voting share holder, giving it the most power to influence the institution's decisions.

The IMF is a financial agency with 184 members, where each dollar donated is counted as a vote.

A major decision requires an 85 percent majority vote, which ensures that the US, with 17 percent of the votes, has a veto over the fund's substantial business. The 80 poorest countries have about a 10 percent voting share between them.

At the current IMF summit in Singapore, the body aims to democratize by giving more voting power to China, South Korea, Turkey and Mexico. However, this would be at the expense of other developing countries, delegates in Batam said.

Sameer Nadim, the executive director of 50 Years is Enough, a US based civil society organization (CSO) dedicated to the profound transformation of

the World Bank and IMF, said that the four new countries would not be affected by the institutions' policies.

However, "Southern Africa will lose half of its voting shares under the current reform proposal. All the countries in Africa, controlling 5 percent of the voting shares in total, will go down to 2.5 (percent)," Nadim said. "So, if we look at the principle under which the idea is proposed, it means that the least affected you are (by IMF policies), the more power you will have. But if you are more affected, you will have less power," he said.

Bello suggested there should be alternatives for sources of development funding apart from Breton Woods, the collective name for the IMF and the World Bank.

"There has been an effort in Latin America where countries like Venezuela, Bolivia and Cuba have established an alternative body for development funding," he said.

Bello was referring to the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). A funding body initiated by Venezuela and Cuba, ALBA is an alternative to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA or ALCA in Spanish) proposed by the United States.

Activists at the talks agreed on the establishment of regional funding bodies because they would understand the complexity of a region better than international institutions like the IMF.

Indonesia's Suharto looks healthy at wedding

Agence France Presse - September 16, 2006

Jakarta — Former Indonesian president Suharto, who escaped trial for corruption on health grounds, appeared healthy as he attended the wedding of one of his grandsons.

The 85-year-old former president arrived at the At-Tien mosque shortly before the wedding of Danny Bimo Hendra Utomo, the son of his eldest daughter Siti "Tutut" Hardiyanti Rukmana, to actress Lulu

Tobing, ElShinta radio said Saturday.

Suharto, who walked with a cane, appeared healthy and cheerful, a reporter said. He made no comment. However, the reporter said that he walked aided by a close aide when he entered the venue.

It was his first public appearance since he left hospital on a stretcher in May after three operations and nearly a month of treatment for stomach problems that had left him critically ill.

Suharto ruled Indonesia with an iron grip until he stepped down amid mounting unrest in 1998, since when he has lived quietly at his private residence.

The former autocrat escaped trial for suspected corruption on health grounds with lawyers offering medical evidence that he could no longer hold or follow a normal conversation.

He has been hospitalised several times for intestinal bleeding, stroke and heart problems. In the last case, he spent two nights at a state hospital for anaemia following intestinal bleeding.

Anti-IMF forum dismisses threats

Jakarta Post - September 15, 2006

Andi Haswidi, Batam, Riau Islands — Activists said Thursday they had received threats from people claiming to represent local NGOs warning them to call off a planned international antiglobalization forum on Batam island.

"They are threatening to deploy some 2,900 people to besiege this meeting venue tomorrow," Ramses, an organizing committee member for the international civil society organizations (CSOs) forum, said in Batam on Thursday.

The three-day gathering is due to start Friday at the island's haj dormitory to coincide with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank meetings taking place in Singapore, some 40 minutes away by ferry from Batam.

Other committee members also said they had received anonymous phone calls and text messages threatening to “break up” the forum.

Several banners carrying slogans denouncing the planned antiglobalization gathering were seen in the Nagoya area of Batam before being removed by authorities earlier this week. The banners suggested the forum lacked the spirit of nationalism and could scare off investors from the industrial island.

On Sept. 4, 18 local NGOs published a statement in a local newspaper asking police to ban the forum. Police in Batam did initially decide to bar the gathering, but were overridden by National Police Headquarters.

Ramses said the threats began arriving after organizers rejected a request from a group of men claiming to represent several local NGOs to be included on the organizing committee.

"We didn't reject them. We merely offered them the chance to be participants in the forum. It was impossible to include them on the committee because it was already established a long time ago," he said.

Donatus Markus, director of the International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development (INFID), also the caretaker of the forum, said the gathering would go ahead as planned.

"Personally, I'm surprised to hear threats coming from people claiming to represent local NGOs. In our previous event in Yogyakarta last year, local NGOs were very cooperative. They even helped secure our forum," he said.

Commenting on the extensive police presence around the haj dormitory and in other areas of Batam, Donatus said it indicated something “unexpected” could happen during the forum.

Riau Islands Police chief Brig. Gen. Sutarman told The Jakarta Post more than 800 officers from a special antiterror squad would be deployed to secure the gathering. "We held a preparatory ceremony this morning (Thursday)," he said.

The forum will be attended by some 600 activists

representing international civil society organizations, including Oxfam International, Infid, 50 Years is Enough, South Jubilee, Bank Information Center and the North East Civil Society Initiative Against International Financial Institutions.

The gathering will discuss what is seen as the triple crises of legitimacy, role and budget at the IMF and its twin sister, the World Bank, and will involve campaign materials from numerous CSO representatives.

Indonesia's former chief economics minister, Kwik Kian Gie, who is known for his staunch opposition to IMF policies, has been invited to speak at the forum.

Foreign NGOs get police approval for Batam gathering

Jakarta Post - September 12, 2006

Fadli, Batam — After threatening to break up any gathering of foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Batam, the Riau Islands provincial police on Monday agreed to abide by a National Police decision to allow the NGOs to meet.

Riau Police chief Brig. Gen. Sutarman told The Jakarta Post that the local police actually stood by their decision to ban the NGOs' activities, which are timed to coincide with the annual meeting of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in Singapore this week.

"However, because the authority to issue any permits for such international activities is in the hands of the National Police Headquarters, we cannot do more than that," Sutarman said. "The National Police Headquarters possibly has its own considerations," he added. "As (the NGOs) hold a permit, their activities are legal, so local police have no authority to disperse them."

The meeting is to be attended by 700 representatives of 74 NGOs from 40 countries under the coordination of the International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development (Infid). In preparation,

the Riau Police held a meeting to discuss security.

Meanwhile, the management of the haj dormitory in Batam acknowledged receiving a down payment from Infid to lease the dormitory's facilities for the meeting.

The caretaker of the dormitory, Lili Ramli, told the Post on Monday that her office had received a 15 percent down payment, or Rp 100 million (US\$10,526), from Infid a week ago.

"We have also extended the time limit for Infid to arrange permits from the police. We had earlier given them until Thursday, but we extended it until tomorrow," said Lili.

She said Infid had submitted an agenda for the meeting to run from Sept. 15 through 17. According to the contract, the dormitory will provide accommodation and meals for 700 participants.

"We've heard that Infid has acquired a permit from the National Police Headquarters. However, we're waiting for written consent and are still keeping in touch to make arrangements for the event," said Lili.

The dormitory, which has rooms for 960 people, was quiet Monday. Some dormitory staff members and officers from the Batam Industrial Development Authority's security directorate guarded its perimeters.

The rooms and auditorium were still locked, even though the schedule specified that Infid should have begun preparations there.

"Members of the organizing committee should have already arrived on Monday to arrange for the event, but there's still no news as of this moment. We must also wait for written approval from the police, who are still confused over the matter. Reports in the newspapers are different from reality," said Lili.

Lili added that her office would return the down payment if Infid failed to obtain permission from the Riau Police.

Trash slides a daily risk for scavengers

Jakarta Post - September 12, 2006

Rusman, Bekasi — It was almost midnight on Thursday when people living around the Bantar Gebang dump in Bekasi were woken by a loud roar — a mountain of trash collapsing.

Cries for help could be heard from the dump. A truck skidded on garbage from the slide and crashed into a house and one of the dump's walls, which collapsed. Dozens of scavengers searched through the rubbish, this time not looking for things to sell, but for their friends.

Residents of the Sumur Batu, Ciketing Udik and Cikuwul subdistricts, which border the dump, also helped in the hunt for survivors in the dump's Zone 3, the headlights of nearby trucks providing the only illumination.

At 1 a.m. on Friday, two bodies were found, covered in mud and trash. "I saw one of the victims had been dragged along by the truck, because they had been standing right next to it," said Supriyadi, 30. Three people who worked as scavengers died in the incident, while five others were injured.

Marsinah, 40, who was five months pregnant died, along with 17-year-old Miswan, both from Karawang in Bekasi. Nursonip, from Cirebon in West Java and 35 years old, was also killed.

Adi, Noto, Tono and Samudi were all injured in the accident and recovered at Bekasi Hospital. The fifth injured scavenger, Yana, has been transferred to Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital in Jakarta.

Most of Jakarta's garbage is sent to Bantar Gebang dump, which is located about 11 kilometers away from the city of Bekasi. Around 600 trucks work around the clock to deliver about 6,000 tons of trash every day. The dump is divided into five zones, and the trash can reach up to 15 meters in height.

Zone 3, where the trash slide took place, is about 500 meters from the entrance gate. Scavengers' shanties sit amid the piles of trash, and the sight of people sitting in waste water from garbage trucks is a common one.

Food kiosks stand along the side of the road that runs through the dump, selling coffee, snacks and meals just meters from rotting trash.

"This is to fulfill our daily meal needs. The place doesn't matter. For scavengers it's usual to eat surrounded by the smell of garbage," said kiosk operator Maemunah, 32.

Dozens of tents are set up in the dump. When the slide happened, they were dragged for about five meters.

"The slide was so strong. Everybody was dragged. The ones who died were asleep. Other people were dragged too, but they weren't buried in the trash so they could be rescued immediately," Maemunah said.

Mochamad Helmy of the Environment Ministry said the dump's condition meant it was prone to slides, particularly in Zone 3. He said he believed the operator was not using a sanitary landfill system as it claimed to but was instead practicing an open dumping system, and that Zone 3 had been filled beyond its capacity.

The maximum height for trash piles is 15 meters, he said, but the trash in zone reached 20 meters in some places. "So it's over its capacity and very prone to slides," he said.

The scavengers, however, are not about to leave the area. "Where would we find another job? Going back to our home towns is not an option because we don't have anything to do there and there's no land to work on," Supriyadi said.

He was almost killed in the incident as he was one of about 50 workers picking through the garbage when it happened. "Trash slides have always been a risk," he said.

Police confusion leaves NGO meet in Batam up in the air

Jakarta Post - September 11, 2006

Fadli, Batam, Riau Islands — Confusion among the police means it remains unclear whether a group of local and international non-governmental organizations will be allowed to hold a forum in Batam to coincide with the IMF-World Bank meetings in Singapore this week.

Riau Islands Police deputy chief Sr. Comr. Sulistyono insisted Saturday the local authorities remained opposed to the event although his superior, National Police chief Gen. Sutanto, has said the activists, from the International Forum on Indonesian Development (Infid), would be permitted to hold their planned seminar in Batam but not "political activities".

In apparent defiance of his superior, Sulistyono told The Jakarta Post the Riau Islands Police remained against the gathering.

"We (the police) maintain our stance not to allow any foreign NGO activities in Batam. I'm sure you have heard statements by local police chief (Brig. Gen. Sutarman) about local NGOs (here), which were against the presence of foreign NGOs. We still stick to that statement," Sulistyono said at Tanjung Kasam in Batam.

Eighteen local NGOs have voiced their opposition to Infid's meeting, although they have been accused of offering their services for hire to the authorities.

When asked about national chief Sutanto's statement, Sulistyono decided it was time to leave. "If you are not convinced, just ask the regional police chief again," he said, hastily entering his car.

Meanwhile, regional police chief Sr. Comr. Eko Hadi Sutedjo said that security in the Batam had been raised to "alert" status in conjunction with the IMF and World Bank meeting in Singapore and

the proposed meeting in Batam.

"We've raised the status because Batam has become a target of terrorist crimes," Eko said. He declined to comment when asked about Sutanto's remark.

Eko said based on previous experience, meetings held by NGOs in Batam had the potential to create chaos. "Those understanding the conditions in Batam are the local police. We have seen that foreign NGOs' meeting in Batam has the potential of creating unrest for foreign investors here," Eko said.

The forum plans to discuss labor and trade issues in an alternative protest meeting to the IMF-World Bank meetings in Singapore. The police have worried the meeting could stir up factory workers on the island. Batam is part of a special economic zone, supplying labor to factories based there, many of which are owned by international investors.

Infid has condemned the Riau Islands Police's decision to ban it from holding the gathering. Group deputy director Dian Kartika Sari said last week the reason the authorities used to ban the gathering were legally groundless.

"This is a democratic country where thousand of workers are allowed to hold rallies. Why are they banning us from holding a seminar?" he said.

Search for dump slide victims called off

Jakarta Post - September 11, 2006

Rusman, Bekasi — After three days of sifting through trash to search for the bodies of more victims who may be buried under a garbage slide in Bantar Gebang dump, Bekasi, the police and dump operator PT Patriot Bangkit Bekasi decided Saturday evening to stop the search.

The slide, which occurred late Thursday night at the eight-hectare Zone 3 of the dump, killed at least three scavengers and seriously injured five

others. Witnesses said that about 50 people were picking through the garbage when the accident took place.

Patriot legal representative Jaya Butar Butar said Sunday that the decision to stop the search was taken because no more bodies were found in the last two days and there were no reports of missing people. "The official number of victims is eight. Three dead and five injured," he told The Jakarta Post.

He said that the company had handed over compensation money to the relatives of the eight victims. He declined to reveal the amount given.

The police have started an investigation into the incident by questioning four people, including truck drivers and employees of the dump operator. Bekasi Police chief Sr. Comr. Chairul Anwar said that they had yet to name any suspect.

Experts from the State Ministry for the Environment, however, underlined several facts that may put the company in hot water.

The ministry's assistant deputy of the Household Waste Pollution Control Unit, Mochamad Helmy, revealed violations in procedures at the sanitary landfill as the dump operator piled the trash to up to 20 meters high, while the standard height should be 12 to 15 meters.

He also pointed out that the dump operator should put a layer of soil between every two meters of trash to absorb methane gas produced by decomposing trash that may cause explosions.

Bekasi Council member Slamet Siahaan from Commission D that oversees environmental issues, said that the dump operator had failed to do its job. "They just didn't do what they should do... They made a fatal mistake," he told the Post.

But Jaya asked the public not to hold the company responsible. "It's a natural disaster... Besides, the police investigation is still ongoing," he said.

Search for dump slide victims continues

Jakarta Post - September 10, 2006

Rusman, Bekasi — The search for more victims of the huge dump slide east of Jakarta continued Saturday, but the death toll remained at three, with around 20 more people still thought to be missing.

Police have begun investigating the cause of the incident, which occurred on Friday morning at Bekasi's Bantar Gebang dump and injured five others.

Dedi, a scavenger, said he believed many of his peers were buried in the pile. "I saw dozens of people working when the trash collapsed. Their bodies were covered by the waste," he told The Jakarta Post.

Police said it was difficult to confirm the number of scavengers working at the site because none had legal documents. The dump operator, PT Patriot Bangkit Bekasi, has sent eight earth movers to the area to help with the search.

Bekasi Police chief Sr. Comr. Chairul Anwar said police had questioned four witnesses, including a truck driver and a dump operator staffer, over the incident. "We have yet to name any suspects," he said Saturday.

The trash slide took place in the eight-hectare Zone 3 of the dump early Friday morning. Three scavengers, Marsinah, 40, Miswan, 17, and Sonif, 30, were killed in the slide.

Four of the injured victims — Samudi, Adi, Rasnoto and Wastono — left Bekasi Hospital Saturday, while the fifth, Yana, was still being treated for her injuries at Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital.

A lawyer representing the dump operator insisted the incident was a "natural disaster". M. Jaya Butar Butar said a layer of soil had been applied over every two meters of rubbish as was legally

required.

"It is purely a natural disaster. However, we will provide compensation to the victim's families," he said after accompanying his client during police questioning.

Around 6,000 tons of Jakarta's daily waste is dumped in the landfill at Bantar Gebang. The Jakarta administration pays Bekasi city a management fee of US\$5.60 a ton for use of the dump.

Last year, Jakarta introduced a high-tech waste management facility in Bojong, Bogor, to reduce its dependency on Bantar Gebang, but local residents opposed to the site forced its closure.

Police rapped for banning NGO gathering in Batam

Jakarta Post - September 8, 2006

Ary Hermawan, Jakarta — International NGOs have slammed the Riau Police's decision to ban them from holding a gathering next week on Batam Island to protest the annual World Bank-IMF meetings in Singapore.

"We deplore the misleading statement of Riau Islands Police chief Brig. Gen. Sutarman that our planned gathering in Batam would trigger instability and riots," the International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development (INFID) said in a statement sent to The Jakarta Post on Thursday.

INFID's statement was issued on behalf of the members of the People's Alliance Against the World Bank and IMF (ARM-IFIS), which includes Debt Watch Indonesia, FSPSI Reformasi, PADI Indonesia and ISMAD.

The Riau Islands Police have rejected INFID's request to hold a gathering in Batam to oppose the 10-day 2006 Annual Meetings of the Boards of Governors of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group, which will be attended by 16,000 foreign delegates from 184 countries worldwide.

The police's decision is supported by 18 local NGOs, which said the activists' meeting would undermine investment on the island. "I say we will disperse them. If we're unable to do it ourselves, we'll do it together with the (local) NGOs," Sutarman told local daily newspaper the Batam Pos on Tuesday.

However, speculation that the local NGOs are being paid off by business interests on the island is rife, with people claiming they had seen posters in Batam saying: "We provide people for demonstrations, price negotiable." The police earlier met with the local NGOs to discuss the INFID meetings.

Local NGOs that oppose INFID's forum include Independent Political Watch, Cinta Anak Negeri and youth group Pemuda Pancasila.

INFID NGOs had planned to hold the International People's Forum (IPF) at the Batam Haj Dormitory. Events at the forum include a planned International-National Media Workshop from Sept. 12 to 13, a committee meeting on Sept. 14 and the main event from Sept. 15 to 17.

In a letter made available to The Jakarta Post, the Riau Islands Police said they could not provide INFID with a permit to hold the meeting on the island as it would cause "economic disadvantages" to Indonesia. "There are fears from the employers in the Batamindo industrial region that the gathering would have bad influence on workers," it says. The police believe the gathering would also prompt conflict because local NGOs had expressed opposition to INFID meetings.

INFID, meanwhile, called Sutarman's statement provocative and said it could incite public unrest. "If he reads the letter we sent, he should have understood the purpose of the meeting, which is to express people's concerns," it said.

INFID NGOs have expressed their strong opposition to lender institutions such as the Indonesian Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. They said the two agencies often have hidden agendas behind their decisions to disburse loans.

The group's deputy director, Dian Kartika Sari, said the reasons the authorities used to ban the

gathering were legally groundless. "This is a democratic country where thousands of workers are allowed to hold rallies. Why are they banning us from holding a seminar?" Dian told the Post".

She said the NGOs would continue to persuade decision-makers to help them secure a permit for the meetings. "Some are now lobbying lawmakers, while some others are trying to talk to officials at the National Police Headquarters," she said.

She said she had no plans to talk to the local NGOs that opposed the planned meeting and would instead focus on getting a permit. "I don't think we're going to talk with them, as it would only worsen the situation," she said.

ACEH

Study suggests change needed in Aceh rebuilding authority

Jakarta Post - September 15, 2006

Ridwan Max Sijabat, Jakarta — A new study recommends transferring the job of rebuilding Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam to the incoming provincial administration, in order to bypass problems in the current reconstruction programs.

The study conducted in August and September by Jakarta-based environment watchdog Greenomics found that the Aceh and Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (BRR) and the central government have contributed to the slow pace of reconstruction.

"To cut off bureaucratic hindrances from Jakarta and avoid internal ones at the BRR, the government should trust the new Aceh administration to do the rehabilitation and reconstruction work. The BRR will play its role as a coordinating body and policy maker while the Aceh administration will be fully accountable for all work in the field," Greenomics executive director Elfian Effendi said here Thursday.

Effendi argued the transfer of authority is allowed by the 2005 law on rehabilitation and reconstruction in Aceh.

"It is better for the government and the BRR to prepare a smooth transition... so that the reconstruction work will be fully taken over by the new Aceh government" after local elections in December, he said, adding that this issue has been discussed with BRR chairman Kuntoro Mangkusubroto and the current Aceh provincial administration.

The study found mismanagement and corrupt practices were the two main problems at the BRR, while the central government failed to work smoothly with the agency and the Aceh administration to speed the pace of reconstruction.

Indonesian Corruption Watch (ICW) recently released a report detailing alleged corruption in BRR projects. Aceh prosecutors have declared two BRR staffers suspects in a graft case connected to the publication of a book by the agency.

According to the study, 60 percent of the major obstacles to progress derived from the BRR and the central government.

"BRR is not a super-body and Kuntoro is not a superman. This has been evidenced by the agency's failure to achieve its targets and by his inability to control the agency," Elfian said.

Greenomics was optimistic that the reconstruction work would win full support from the Acehnese people under the new provincial administration.

Major obstacles in Aceh reconstruction work:

1. The central government:

- Failure to rule on land appropriation, logistical supply, tax and spatial zoning
- Lack of flexibility in budget disbursement -Lack of policy on wood supply for housing construction
- Poor awareness of conditions

2. BRR:

- Slow planning and execution
- Slow policy and decision-making process
- Failure to reach targets
- Weak database on aid recipients
- Poor coordination with Aceh government
- Overly centralized and bureaucratic structure

- Absence of permanent work system
- Lack of professionalism
- Ineffective internal control mechanisms
- Corruption

3. International donors:

- Overly bureaucratic aid disbursement
 - High overhead
 - Slow planning and execution
 - Lower level of commitment
 - Insufficient familiarity with Indonesian rules
-

Two BRR officials named suspects in corruption case

Jakarta Post - September 14, 2006

Nani Afrida, Banda Aceh — Prosecutors have named two staffers of the Aceh and Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (BRR) as suspects in alleged corruption involving the publication of a book by the national agency.

BRR budget official Achyarmansyah and Hendrawan Diandi, who led the book project team, are charged with inflating the price of the agency's annual report, *Developing the Promised Land*.

"There are some indications there may be more suspects from BRR. Right now we're developing the investigation into the two staffers," Aceh Prosecutor's Office head Teuku Zakaria told The Jakarta Post on Wednesday.

Printing companies PT Wahana Multiguna Mandiri and PT Patriot Pembaharuan Jaya are also possible suspects, he added.

Zakaria said both Achyarmansyah and Hendrawan were named suspects after 20 days of investigation. The two were among 13 witnesses questioned about the graft case, 10 of whom work for the BRR.

"The financial loss of the markup case is Rp 480.5 million (around US\$50,578)," he said. Zakaria said the book project was carried out without a public tender, leading to inflated prices.

Four editions of the book were printed before the price was determined, and every edition cost a different amount, he added.

The first edition of some 600 copies, he said, was printed in May by PT Multiguna Mandiri at a price of Rp 570,000 each. The second edition of 250 copies by the same company cost Rp 450,000 per copy. Six hundred copies of the third edition, an English version, were printed by PT Patriot Pembaharuan Jaya at a price of Rp 575,000 per copy. The fourth edition was printed by CV Rizki Grafis for Rp 220,000 each.

Zakaria said the book should have cost only Rp 265,000 per copy if printed at the Banda Aceh printing office. "We're still gathering evidence to name other suspects," he said.

BRR spokeswoman Mirza Keumala said Wednesday she had not yet been informed about the corruption charges against Achyarmansyah and Hendrawan. "But from the beginning (of the investigation) we have said that we will abide by the law and respect the legal process," she added.

A recent report from Indonesian Corruption Watch alleged irregularities including corruption and collusion in five BRR projects valued at a total of Rp 23.8 billion. The projects were carried out in the 2005 budget year, which ended in April 2006. The allegedly graft-tainted book procurement was one of the projects.

The agency has acknowledged that it sometimes bypassed official procedures, arguing that this was justified under existing regulations governing emergency work in Aceh.

Acting BRR secretary Teuku Kamaruzzaman, a former Aceh rebel leader, has admitted the agency directly appointed several partner companies to complete the projects, in order to avoid numerous technical and bureaucratic hurdles.

The companies were appointed without tender not because of collusion, he said, but because the work was of an emergency nature, so direct appointments were allowed under existing regulations.

A presidential decree on the agency requires it to

hold public tenders for all projects valued at Rp 50 million or more, except for those projects classified as emergency work.

Aceh revenues soar but poverty remains

Jakarta Post - September 14, 2006

Jakarta — A record-breaking increase in revenue has failed to alleviate high levels of poverty in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, according to a new report.

The joint study was carried out by the World Bank and leading universities in Aceh with support from the Indonesian government. It found that despite a sixfold increase in revenue since 1999, as well as rich natural resources, Aceh remains the fourth-poorest province in the nation.

The Aceh Expenditure Analysis for 2006 examines revenues and expenditures, as well as the financial management capabilities of Aceh's provincial and local governments.

"We now have a comprehensive picture of existing and near-future financial resources for Aceh for the first time," said Joel Hellman, World Bank coordinator for Aceh reconstruction.

Decentralization, the granting of special autonomy status in 2001 and a large influx of post-tsunami aid account for the increase in revenue. As of June 2006, US\$4.9 billion worth of reconstruction was underway in Aceh, out of some US\$8 billion in total pledges.

The creation of a special autonomy fund in the new Aceh governance law will further increase revenues starting in 2008 to some Rp 13 trillion (US\$1.4 billion) per year, more than compensating for a decline in oil and gas production in the province.

Yet Aceh's poverty rate, which measured 28.5% before the tsunami, is likely to have increased since then.

"Local government capacity to manage public funds is still very weak and increased spending on

salaries and facilities is a very worrying trend," said Ayha Ihsan, the Acehese co-author of the report.

"For us Acehese, one of the most critical reforms is capacity building for these officials and reforming the incentives and sanctions regime governing their activities."

Aceh survivors slam agency over 'broken promises'

Jakarta Post - September 12, 2006

Nani Afrida, Banda Aceh — More than 2,000 displaced people from 14 regencies in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam braved a heavy rain Monday to stage a protest at the Aceh-Nias Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Agency (BRR) office in Banda Aceh (photo).

The crowd, grouped in the Inter Barracks Communication Forum, arrived in trucks and public transportation vehicles to demand the houses, land and economic assistance they say were promised them after the 2004 tsunami. Many of the protesters brandished banners, some of which read: "Don't steal people's money", "Open your eyes, your ears" and "Don't get paid without working."

They said they were tired of the unfulfilled promises of the BRR and the complicated bureaucratic procedures they faced when they attempted to claim assistance.

"We have been registered a number of times but have not received a house so far," Muktar, 45, a resident of Paya Kameng village in Mesjid Raya district, Aceh Besar, told The Jakarta Post.

He accused the agency of failing to help tsunami survivors. He said he had asked the BRR for help in restoring his shrimp pond destroyed in the tsunami, but received no response. "Other relief agencies involved in restoring fish ponds have completed their work in Aceh," Muktar said.

A resident of Punge Blang Cut in Banda Aceh, Nurhayati, 50, said the reconstruction agency had

failed to deliver on promised start-up capital to help tsunami survivors open businesses. "Reports say a lot of money has been provided for Aceh, but why aren't we getting any?" she asked.

Nurhayati said survivors needed assistance to set up businesses that would allow them to support themselves. "We don't want to be called lazy and dependent on aid, but help us so we" can help ourselves, she said.

WEST PAPUA

Three Abepura defendants jailed

Jakarta Post - September 16, 2006

Jayapura — The Jayapura District Court sentenced Friday three of the last seven defendants on trial for their involvement in the deadly Abepura clash to four and five years in prison.

The Friday session, presided over by Judge Moris Ginting, found the first defendant Yesaya Eko Merano Berotabui guilty of violating Article 214 of the Criminal Code for disobeying police orders. The sentence was a year less than that recommended by the prosecution.

The judges handed down a more lenient sentence because they found the defendant honest and straightforward during the proceedings. However, Eko did not accept the court ruling and immediately filed an appeal.

Outside the court, Eko, who was accompanied by his father, C. Berotabui, chief of the Papua Protestant Church Am synod, yelled in protest. "Although I'm convicted, it doesn't weaken the students' struggle to demand PT Freeport's closure," he said, referring to the mining company in the province.

The two other defendants, Aris Mandowen and Phiter Stevanus Bonay, were each sentenced to five years imprisonment for the same crime. Their attorney, David Victor Sitorus, expressed disappointment with the court ruling which he deemed unfair. "It's inconceivable that just by hurling rocks at an officer they were sentenced to five years in prison, especially when their actions did not

cause the death of the officer," he said.

Two more defendants are awaiting their verdicts.

AJI concerned about the expel of Australian Journalists

Jakarta Post - September 15, 2006

Pontianak (Agencies) — The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) Indonesia Saturday expressed its concern about the expel of five Australian journalists from Papua when they were carried out their jobs in the province.

AJI chairman Heru Hendratmoko said that the deportation of the five television journalists was a violation against the Indonesian press law, ruling that journalists are free to carry out their jobs.

Quoted by Antara news agency, Heru said that the deportation would hamper image of Indonesia because it may spark accusation that the authorities were not being transparent about the province.

Presenter Naomi Robson of the public affairs program "Today Tonight" and four members of her film crew arrived at the Papuan capital Jayapura Wednesday on tourist visas and were questioned by authorities soon after.

Today Tonight told its viewers Thursday that the crew had gone to Papua to rescue a six-year-old orphan boy named Wa Wa who is destined to be eaten by his tribe, "the last known practicing cannibals on earth."

The network crew were escorted by immigration officials on board a commercial flight Thursday from Papua to the national capital, Jakarta, en route to Australia, Papua Police Chief Maj. Gen. Tommy Jacobus said. "They admitted to being journalists who were intending to report on events here," Jacobus was quoted by AP as saying.

Abepura defendants get five years

Jakarta Post - September 15, 2006

Ayapura — The Jayapura District Court on Thursday sentenced two of seven remaining defendants to five years in prison for their part in a fatal clash with police on March 16 in Abepura.

The clash took place during a protest against mining giant PT Freeport Indonesia. Four police officers and a member of the Air Force died in the violence.

In its verdict, the panel of judges hearing the case, presided over by Moris Ginting, said Muhammad Khaitan and Sedrik Jitmau were guilty of violating Article 214, Paragraph 1, of the Criminal Code on disobeying orders from security officers.

The five-year sentences given the pair matched the recommendation by prosecutors.

Sedrik, who is in his third year at Filadelpia High School in Sentani, wore his gray-and-white school uniform in court.

David Viktor Sitorus, one of the defendants' lawyers, said they would appeal the sentences. He said the judges disregarded much of the evidence presented by the defense. He pointed out that not a single witness saw Sedrik hurl stones at the officers.

Five more defendants in the case are still being tried. Verdicts for three of the defendants are expected this Friday. Sixteen other defendants in the case were earlier sentenced to between five and 15 years in prison.

Papuan defendants on hunger strike

Jakarta Post - September 15, 2006

Jakarta — Six of the seven Papuans detained for allegedly killing two US nationals and an Indonesian near the PT Freeport gold mine in Timika, Papua, have gone on a hunger strike to protest their trial.

"The hunger strike will continue until justice is served," the six Papuans said in a statement Wednesday. The defendants, including alleged ringleader Anthonius Wamang, are detained at National Police Headquarters.

They objected to the court's decision to let US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents who had helped arrest them testify against them. "The FBI agents tricked us," they said.

The Papuans' lawyer, Johnson Panjaitan, said the trial of his clients was biased and unfair.

Five Australian journalists deported from Papua

Associated Press - September 14, 2006

Jayapura — Five Australian TV journalists were being deported from Indonesia on Thursday after traveling to restive Papua province on tourist visas, police and witnesses said.

Presenter Naomi Robson of the public affairs program "Today Tonight" and four members of her film crew were escorted by immigration officials on board a commercial flight from Papua to the capital, Jakarta, said Papua Police Chief Maj. Gen Tommy Jacobus. From Jakarta they will be deported, he said.

"They admitted to being journalists who were intending to report on events here," Jacobus told reporters. "It is best if we deport them."

The five journalists were questioned by immigration officials on their arrival in the Papuan capital Jayapura on Wednesday. Indonesia requires foreign media workers to obtain journalist visas before they arrive in the country. Extra permission is required to visit Papua, where a low-level separatist conflict has

simmered for years.

Papuans protest testimony from FBI

Jakarta Post - September 13, 2006

Ary Hermawan, Jakarta — Six of the seven Papuan men standing trial for allegedly killing two Americans and one Indonesian in 2002 objected to testimony by US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents Tuesday.

The agents, Ronald C. Eowan and Paul Ryan Mayers, helped arrest the seven suspects, including alleged ringleader Antonius Wamang, in Timika, Papua, in January.

They lured the suspects from their hiding place by promising asylum in the US, where they would not be prosecuted. After the Papuans came out with their bags packed, the agents turned them over to the police.

"This man is a liar!" defendant Ishaq Onawame cried when Eoman entered the courtroom. "I want him out or we will get out of here!" But Judge Andriani Nurdin ignored the defendants' protests and allowed the agents to testify.

Infuriated by the judge's decision, the defendants stormed out of the courtroom. Their lawyers from the Indonesian Legal Aid Association followed.

Defense lawyer Johnson Panjaitan said the court had violated Article 60 of the Criminal Code, which stipulates that prosecutors should summon eyewitnesses.

"I don't see the point in bringing them to testify in the trial," he told The Jakarta Post. "What kind of witnesses are they?" Anita Asterida, one of the prosecutors, said there were many ways to prove a criminal act, including presenting the FBI agents who made the arrest possible.

"We have to show that Indonesia is a member of Interpol, which facilitates investigations," she told the Post, adding that the prosecutors would present another FBI agent to testify in the trial

on Friday.

All but one of the defendants have denied involvement in the deadly shooting near the site of mining giant PT Freeport Indonesia.

In a video played during the session, Wamang told FBI agents and police that he had fired shots during the ambush at Tembagapura, killing US nationals Ricky Lynn Spier, 44, and Edwin Leon Burgen, 71, and Indonesian FX Bambang Riwanto.

Survivors of the attack, including Patsy Spier, Kenneth Ball and Stephen Emma, who testified earlier in the trial, attended Tuesday's session. "I'll be here for the whole trial. I want to make sure that the trial is fair and transparent," Spier told the Post.

One of the seven defendants was absent Tuesday.

MILITARY TIES

Gus Dur denies lobbying US over military ties

Jakarta Post - September 12, 2006

Ridwan Max Sijabat, Jakarta — Former president Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid has denied helping the State Intelligence Agency (BIN) lobby the United States to lift a military embargo against Indonesia. However, Gus Dur said he did give a BIN official permission to use his name "for the sake of the nation".

He added that he was investigating whether close associates had associated his name with the venture without his permission.

The former president insisted that neither he nor his institution had made any agreements about asking the US Congress to resume military cooperation with Indonesia.

"Neither the Gus Dur Foundation nor I have ever made any deal with BIN nor hired a US company to seek resumption of the military training program," he told a press conference here Monday.

Gus Dur said BIN deputy chief As'ad Said Ali and several other intelligence agents had met with him

one day in 2004, asking him if it was okay to make use of his name for the national interest.

"Upon hearing the words 'for the sake of the nation', I replied: 'please do.' And I had no idea this conditional permission would be misused to lobby for the lifting of the military embargo" he said. As'ad is a member of Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Islamic organization previously chaired by Gus Dur, his daughter Zannuba "Yenny" Arrifah Chafsoh Rahman said.

A recent report from the US-based Center for Public Integrity (www.publicintegrity.org/icij) disclosed that BIN had used the former president's foundation to hire Washington lobbying firm Richard L. Collins & Co. to persuade the US Congress to lift the military embargo. The revelation sparked protests from Indonesian human rights groups.

The report also said that in compliance with the Foreign Agents Registration Act, the contract between the foundation and the US lobbying company was signed by Muhyiddin Arubusman, a legislator of the National Awakening Party (PKB) founded by Gus Dur. The contract says he is the foundation's deputy chief.

According to the contract documents the foundation paid the company US\$30,000 monthly from May to July, 2005. BIN picked up the contract directly in September 2005 and continued it until November 2005, when the US lifted restrictions on defense exports to Indonesia. "It further explains that Collins" will aid the Gus Dur Foundation, which is working on behalf of the Indonesian Bureau of National Intelligence "to" educate key officials on the importance of Indonesia's cooperation in combating international terrorism, Indonesia's strides in strengthening democratic institutions, and Indonesia's efforts in asserting civilian control over the military."

Calls to Muhyiddin's cell phone on Monday were not returned.

The former president said he would not sue As'ad and BIN but said this incident should serve as a good lesson for all sides in the future. Yenny added her father and the foundation would not sue BIN because he shared the blame to some extent when he failed to check on the causes with which his name was being connected.

"Lobbying is a normal practice and my father had a positive perception about it, so long as it was done for the good of the nation. The problem is my father was betrayed and his Gus Dur Foundation was reportedly involved in hiring and paying the US lobbying company," she said.

Rights activists question BIN over US lobbying case

Jakarta Post - September 11, 2006

Ary Hermawan, Jakarta — Human rights campaigners are questioning a report that the State Intelligence Agency (BIN) hired Washington lobbying firm Richard L. Collins & Co. in a successful effort to persuade the US Congress to resume military ties with Indonesia.

The report issued by a US based advocacy group said BIN used former president Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid's charitable foundation to hire the lobbying firm for the purpose.

Human Rights Working Group (HRWG) coordinator Rafendi Djamin said BIN's move to hire a foreign lobbying firm to influence other country's policy clearly lacked "accountability and transparency".

"We have to ask from where BIN got the money," he told The Jakarta Post on Saturday. The report said the BIN retained Collins & Co. for US\$30,000 a month in May 2005 to influence the US Congressmen, through the Gus Dur Foundation.

Rafendi called on the House of Representatives to pursue the matter because it had oversight over the intelligence agency. "BIN must explain this case to the House's defense commission," he said.

Rafendi said he believed that President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, as a retired army general with close links to American politicians, must have been informed about such lobbying.

However, Rafendi played down the alleged connection between former president Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid and BIN in the case. "Gus Dur's

(connection with BIN) is not the main issue. It's just a secondary matter," he said.

Gus Dur's eldest daughter Zannuba "Yenny" Arifah Chafsoh Rahman has denied the report, saying her father never had contact with the US-based lobby group.

Yenny suggested Gus Dur's name might have been used by those close to BIN to help them lobby Washington without specific consent from her father. "But as far it was for the good of the nation, it's fine," she said.

George W. Bush's administration ended the 14-year arms embargo imposed on the country last year to improve military ties and help the US in its war against terror. The embargo was imposed after the international community accused the Indonesian Military (TNI) of serious human rights abuses in former province East Timor and Papua.

Former BIN officers have been implicated in the 2004 murder of leading human rights advocate Munir Said Thalib, who co-founded the Commission for Missing Persons and the Victims of Violence (Kontras) and rights watchdog Imparsial. No BIN officials were available for comments on Sunday.

Kontras coordinator Usman Hamid demanded that BIN disclose its lobbying documents to the public. "If the agency had asked Collins & Co. to lobby the US Congress that BIN was not involved in the Munir murder case, there must be a document and an argument supporting the claim," he said.

When asked about the Gus Dur Foundation's involvement in the advocacy, Usman said he had contacted the controversial former president and he denied the report.

Gus Dur told the International Consortium for Investigative Journalism (ICIJ), which was involved in issuing the report, that he did not understand and did not know anything about any contract with the firm. He asked for a copy of the documents used in the lobbying so he could check whether people had used his name.

Gus Dur has made many statements condemning human rights abuses by the military and BIN, and backs thorough investigation into the killing of Munir.

"I think it is shocking," Munir's widow, Suciwati, said about the report. "We will have to check its validity first," she said.

She said BIN might have used Gus Dur's name without his consent to discredit him and divide civil society groups. "They act like they always do," she said. "They will do anything to achieve their goals."

POPULAR RESISTANCE

Kupang students stage rally

Jakarta Post - September 5, 2006

Kupang — Hundreds of university students here rallied Monday to demand their rector be fired for incompetence.

The students from Widya Mandira Catholic University said rector Cosmas Fernandes was not doing his job. They locked the university's main gate. When the rector ordered them to open it, the students told him to go home. Some of them approached him, launching a verbally attack.

"He travels a lot with no clear explanation," a protester said. Security guards escorted the rector home.

PLN customers protest over outages in Mataram

Jakarta Post - September 15, 2006

Panca Nugraha and Fadli, Mataram/Batam — More than 50 Mataram residents rallied outside the PLN building in West Nusa Tenggara on Thursday over the rotating blackouts imposed in the city in the last two months.

The protesters, mostly students, fishermen and other workers, called the state power firm "inconsiderate". "If we pay our bills late, they cut the power off. But when the company imposes blackouts, it gives us no prior notice," said a protester, Hasan.

The protesters urged PLN not to implement large-scale outages during the fasting month of Ramadhan. They complained of hours of blackouts, generally between 8 and 11 p.m.

"What if this happens during Ramadhan? How will we hear the sound of the bedug drum on the television, or the call to prayer? PLN has a responsibility to ensure there are no more blackouts," Hasan said. Implementing blackouts without prior notice also caused damage to electrical appliances, he said.

The general manager of PLN West Nusa Tenggara, Mustiko Bawono, and the GM of PLN Mataram Wasito Adi agreed to meet with the protesters.

Wasito said the rotating outages were necessitated by the low supply of water used to generate power at its plant, which has a capacity of 80 megawatts. "Our power production capacity is very limited. If one of our generators is down, we have no choice but to order blackouts."

In Batam, Riau Islands province, more than 100 residents staged a protest outside the PLN building, demanding a complete rollback of the decision to raise power rates to Rp 1,400 per kilowatt-hour (Kwh) in the household category.

Basaruddin, representing the protesters, demanded to know why such high rates were being imposed in Nongsa fishing community.

PLN said it needed to raise its rates in order to finance the installation of power networks in the area, which it says will cost about Rp 638 million (US\$67,157). He said Rp 1,400/Kwh was much higher than the fixed rate in the business category.

The protesters had been outside the PLN building since early morning, preventing customers from coming in to pay bills.

Ery Ifyandri, the head of PLN Batam, said the rates might not be raised if the Batam city administration approved an additional subsidy for electricity.

HUMAN RIGHTS/LAW

Women call for rethinking of Islamic dogma

Jakarta Post - September 12, 2006

Hera Diani, Jakarta — International women's rights activists called Monday for a reinterpretation of dogmas they said were trapping women in backwardness and poverty in regions with strong Islamic traditions.

They argued that the gender development index (GDI) — a measurement used by the UN and other organizations — as well as other indicators of gender empowerment are low in areas with entrenched patriarchal interpretations of Islam.

The comments were made at a seminar featuring politicians and Islamic activists and leaders from Indonesia and South Asia.

The indicators commonly used to measure women's welfare are life expectancy, literacy, schooling, participation in the labor force, participation in parliament and other forms of governance, and professional accomplishment.

Activists said the province of East Java, which has a strong pesantren (Islamic boarding school) tradition, scores low on measurements of women's development. They added that women appear to fare worse in more-developed areas.

"The higher the human development index (HDI), the lower the GDI. Sidoarjo, for instance, ranks second for HDI in the province, but the GDI ranks 14th, which shows that women lag behind," said legislator Eva Kusuma Sundari from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P).

The situation, she said, has been worsening with the issuance of 41 sharia-inspired bylaws in several regions that discriminate against women and limit their activities. Supporters of the bylaws argue they are designed to protect women and bolster morality.

Activists said the situation in South Asian countries from India to Nepal to Sri Lanka was more or less the same, whether Muslims were in the majority or the minority. Muslim women in these

countries were less literate, less educated and less well-represented in the community.

Indian activist and scholar Haseena Hashia said that while Indian women in general faced many difficulties, Muslim women suffered more. Of India's total population of about 700 million, 13.4 percent are Muslim, making it the second largest religion after Hinduism. "They are the poorest of the poor," she said, addressing the seminar.

The challenges faced by Indian Muslim women, she said, included very low literacy and education rates, no political participation and no role in policy making, poor health conditions, polygamy and trafficking.

"The mindset of parents and the community is that a male child is considered better. Female children often can't go to school. And as far as work participation, only 14.1 percent of Muslim women work," Hashia said.

Activists said in Pakistan, where 98 percent of the population is Muslim, the problems of Muslim women are worsened by the existence of hadud, or Hudood Ordinances, which classify levels of crime and carry severe punishments. The ordinances include an adultery law which can cause female victims of rape to end up in jail.

"People are imposing morality on women. The implementation of hadud laws — which are misunderstood, misused and misapplied — has resulted in the imprisonment of a lot of innocent women," said Pakistani activist Salima Khalimi.

The speakers urged Muslim communities to push for what they called a correct interpretation of Islam as a religion that gives equal rights to men and women. They urged Muslims to adopt the concept that women's rights are human rights.

"The first command received by Prophet Muhammad was iqra or 'read', so how come we have the lowest illiteracy rate in the Muslim community?" said Hashia.

Munir case still open, but police not hopeful

Jakarta Post - September 15, 2006

Jakarta — Although calls to get to the bottom of the murder of human rights activist Munir have come from the very top, the National Police say no one should be getting their hopes up.

"We want the case resolved too, we're not protecting anyone," said National Police chief Gen. Sutanto on Thursday.

He declined to confirm whether he was pessimistic about the ongoing investigation, but did say "we face a number of difficulties in gathering evidence that can stand up in court."

Sutanto was responding to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's statement Monday at the Indonesian Embassy in Helsinki that police were "revitalizing" the investigation team. While Susilo was in Finland's capital to attend the Asia-Europe meeting, the president of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, had asked him Sunday how the investigation of Munir's murder was progressing. Susilo had assured Barroso that the probe continued.

A vocal critic of the military, Munir, 38, was found dead aboard a Garuda aircraft on Sept. 7, 2004, on his way to Amsterdam to pursue postgraduate studies. An autopsy showed that arsenic killed him. A court found off-duty pilot Pollycarpus Budihari Priyanto guilty of putting the arsenic in Munir's drink and sentenced him to 14 years' jail.

The court confirmed the conclusion of a government-established fact-finding team that Pollycarpus had frequent telephone contact with a former deputy of the State Intelligence Agency (BIN), but both denied the communication.

"Pollycarpus did not reveal the identity of anyone else directly related to the murder," Sutanto said, citing what he said was one difficulty in further investigating the case. Another is the

fact the crime was committed onboard an aircraft in flight, he said.

Sutanto said he would “reinforce” the investigation team, defining this as “involving any party that intends to help”, but declined to elaborate.

He said the original members of the team, headed by detective Brig. Gen. Marsudi Hanafi, would not be replaced to ensure continuity.

Munir’s widow, Suciwati, and fellow activists have been campaigning for further investigation into the “masterminds” of his death, and for a new independent team to be formed with the authority to question all necessary parties, including officials and former officials of the intelligence agency.

The previous team failed to summon and question former BIN chief AM Hendropriyono, who has maintained his innocence, as well as that of the agency and its officials.

Sutanto said the current BIN chief Syamsir Siregar “has been very helpful”.

The Central Jakarta District Court stated on Dec. 20 there were “other parties” involved in Munir’s murder. But shedding any more light on the case was up to investigators, the presiding judge said.

The court also concluded that Munir’s criticism of the government, military and intelligence agencies motivated his murder.

Student could face six years for insulting President

Jakarta Post - September 12, 2006

Jakarta — The prosecution asked the West Jakarta District Court on Monday to sentence a student to six years in prison for insulting President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Vice President Jusuf Kalla during a protest in June.

Prosecutor Agung Ardyanto said Fahrur “Paunk”

Rohman, 20, a student at Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, insulted the head of state in a speech during a protest organized by the Alliance of People's Movements and the Try Soeharto Movement. The protest took place on the campus of National University in West Jakarta.

"The defendant violated the Criminal Code by insulting the head of state," he told the court. Agung also accused Paunk of distributing insulting posters and flyers during the protest.

The prosecutor said the posters depicted the President and Vice President, with the words "No Trust", "Down" and "We can't take it anymore". He said the flyers contained the words, "SBY-JK have failed and betrayed reform. Down with SBY-JK right now."

Paunk is being tried under an article in the Criminal Code that was enacted during the Dutch colonial era to protect colonial rulers from defamation. Legal scholars and human rights activists have for years advocated for the article to be scrapped, arguing it infringes on people's freedom of expression.

Meanwhile, two students were detained by the Jakarta Police on Monday after throwing rotten eggs at Deputy Attorney General for Special Crimes Hendarman Supandji at the House of Representatives.

Jayabaya University student Fariz, 22, a member of the Anti-Manipulation at State Enterprises Student Movement (Geram BUMN), allegedly threw three rotten eggs at Hendarman during a recess in a meeting between the Attorney General's Office and House Commission III for legal affairs.

According to the student group's coordinator, Akbar Kiahaly, about seven security guards tackled Fariz and another Geram BUMN member, Dipa, who is a student at the Institute of Social and Political Sciences. "They beat up Fariz and Dipa and kicked them in the face," he alleged.

Akbar said the group threw rotten eggs at Hendarman in protest over the failure of the Attorney General's Office to prosecute graft suspects. "There were 20 of us who made it into the House and we brought three kilograms of rotten

eggs."

Government still mulling Tommy Soeharto's release

Jakarta Post - September 11, 2006

Ary Hermawan, Jakarta -- Although the Cipinang Penitentiary in Jakarta has recommended the conditional release of former president Soeharto's son Hutomo "Tommy" Mandala Putera, who is serving a 15-year jail sentence, the government said it did not necessarily mean that Tommy would soon be a free man.

Tommy was sentenced in 2002 to 15 years in prison for ordering the murder of Supreme Court Justice Syafiuddin Kartasasmita, possession of weapons and fleeing justice and has served less than five years of his sentence.

Justice and Human Rights Minister Hamid Awalludin said last week that the government would still have to weigh Tommy's release and asked the public not to confuse the requirements for a release on parole and a remission.

"Remission is related to a convicts' conduct while he is serving time, while a release on parole requires an examination of how the public would receive news of his release and an assessment of his history before he was jailed," Hamid said, adding that the government would "consider all of those aspects".

Hamid was commenting on media reports that Tommy may be freed by the end of the month.

Hamid stressed that a convict who has served two-thirds of his sentence was only eligible for conditional release, saying that it took more than just legal and judicial considerations to be released on parole. "We have to consider other aspects as well," he said.

The head of Cipinang's drug division, Wibowo Joko Harjono, said the penitentiary had filed a proposal for Tommy's release based on the consideration that he had been well behaved and

had served two-thirds of his sentence in September. "He has fulfilled the administrative requirements," he told The Jakarta Post.

As the son of the New Order strongman, Tommy lived a flamboyant, excessive lifestyle, amassing a vast fortune and benefiting from the privileges given by the government in doing business.

In 2002, Tommy was sentenced to 15 years in prison by the Central Jakarta District Court for hiring two hit men to assassinate Supreme Court Justice Syafiuddin Kartasasmita, who had convicted him earlier in a multimillion-dollar deal.

The sentence was later cut to 10 years on appeal by the Supreme Court, while Tommy continued to receive regular sentence remissions of between six months and one year for "good conduct". He only has three years remaining of his jail term, Joko told the Post.

He added, however, that there was no guarantee Tommy would be released soon. A team at the Jakarta office of the justice ministry will hold a session to decide whether Tommy deserved a release, he said.

The team consists of directors at the Justice and Human Rights Ministry Penitentiary Directorate General. "The number of the team members ranges from 9 to 11," he said.

When asked about the public's response to Tommy's planned release, Joko said he had not "thought that far". "All we know is that he has met the requirements," he said.

Cipinang Penitentiary spokesman Akbar told the Post that the team would conduct a study on the public's response to Tommy's release.

AP news agency reported earlier that Tommy's lawyer refused to comment, saying she had received specific instructions from Tommy not to discuss the release.

Police vow to speed up probe into Munir's murder

Jakarta Post - September 9, 2006

Ary Hermawan, Jakarta — The National Police said Friday it would expedite the probe into the 2004 murder of leading human rights campaigner Munir Said Thalib by seeking hard evidence rather than focusing on confusing witness testimony.

"The police's crime unit division head has instructed a team under the transnational crime unit division to expedite and maximize the investigation," police spokesman Insp. Gen. Paulus Purwoko said.

He said the police faced time-consuming technical obstacles in the investigation. "The crime scene where Munir was killed is different from others that provide dozens of witnesses. In Munir's case, we end up questioning the same witnesses over and over again."

Munir was poisoned on a Garuda Indonesia flight from Jakarta to the Netherlands on Sept. 7, 2004. "We only have the flight attendant and the passengers as witnesses," Purwoko said.

He added that the investigation could no longer rely on witnesses who had chosen to remain silent about the murder. They also have been unable to secure information from Garuda Indonesia pilot Polycarpus Budihari Priyanto, who was sentenced to 14 years in prison for lacing Munir's drink with arsenic. "We believe that he knows all his contacts," Purwoko said.

Polycarpus, who plead not guilty, allegedly made telephone contact with a former senior National Intelligence Agency (BIN) official before and after the killing.

Munir's counterpart at the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras), Usman Hamid, believed Munir's assassination was a conspiracy involving Garuda and BIN officers.

A fact-finding team established by the President has concluded that evidence suggesting the murder was conducted in a conspiracy involving BIN. The agency has denied the allegation.

National Police chief Gen. Sutanto also has said the case will be difficult to resolve if

Pollycarpus, who some believe was an intelligence agent, refuses to cooperate. Purwoko said the police would now try to obtain information from other sources besides Pollycarpus, such as expert witnesses.

During Thursday's commemoration of the second anniversary of Munir's death, hundreds of activists urged the government to form a new team immediately to probe the case. Munir's widow Suciwati said she would write to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to ask that the team have the authority to summon all people suspected of involvement in the murder.

Kontras also filed a lawsuit against Garuda for "negligence" leading to Munir's death. "Garuda has failed to protect its consumers, in this case Munir," Kontras' lawyer Asfinawati of the Jakarta Legal Aid Institute said Thursday.

Suciwati and Usman have traveled to several European countries to seek international support to push the government to speed up the probe. Usman said that some Dutch parliament members were scheduled to visit Indonesia this month to meet government officials, lawmakers and human rights activists.

Kun Angkana, the wife of missing Thai Muslim activist Somchai Neelaphajit, met with Suciwati at Kontras' office last month to give her support for the investigation.

Powerless commission courting politicians

Jakarta Post - September 8, 2006

Jakarta — In an attempt to recoup the power stripped from it by the Constitutional Court, the Judicial Commission is seeking support from political factions at the House of Representatives.

On Thursday, members of the Judicial Commission met with leaders of the National Awakening Party and the National Mandate Party. Meetings with other political factions are planned.

The commission members presented a draft bill to amend the 2004 Judicial Commission Law so as to restore the commission's oversight of judges of all ranks.

Commission member Thahir Saimima said he hoped the amendment would create a balance of power among the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Court and the Judicial Commission. "We want the amendment to carry provisions that each institution has an equal position and each can monitor the others," he said.

Saimima said since its authority was severely reduced by the Constitutional Court, the commission could do nothing about the mountain of complaints it has continued to receive. "We want the Judicial Commission to have the power to act and not just make recommendations," he said.

In the proposed amendment, drafted by a small team formed in the wake of the controversial verdict, the commission also seeks the authority to draw up a code of conduct for judges. In addition, the draft specifies that the Supreme Court is entitled to handle the technical aspects of the judiciary.

The recent Constitutional Court verdict stripped the Judicial Commission of its oversight powers over the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court due to vagueness in the 2004 law that established the body. The ruling found the law unconstitutional because it made no distinction between the "justices" of the Supreme Court and the "judges" of other courts.

In response to the ruling, the House said it would propose an amendment to the Judicial Commission Law and promised to come up with a clear-cut division of powers between the Judicial Commission and the Supreme Court to avoid further conflicts between the two institutions.

Members of the House legislation body have pledged to add amending the law to their list of priorities for 2006.

Responding to the Judicial Commission's proposal, leaders of the PKB expressed their commitment to expediting the amendment.

"We want to delineate the authorities and

procedures for oversight. There won't just be recommendations, but punishments and rewards entailed" for offenses identified by the Judicial Commission, Nursjahbani Katjasungkana of the PKB faction said.

Munir's family demands new probe

Jakarta Post - September 8, 2006

Ridwan Max Sijabat and Wahyoe Boediwardhana, Jakarta/Malang — A human rights group is suing flagship airline Garuda Indonesia over the 2004 death of leading activist Munir Said Thalib, while his bereaved family and colleagues are demanding the formation of a new, independent team to determine who was behind the murder.

Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras) lawyer Asfinawati said the lawsuit was filed Wednesday at the Central Jakarta District Court. It accuses the national airline of "negligence" leading to the death of the human rights campaigner. "Garuda has failed to protect its consumers, in this case Munir," she said Thursday.

Asfinawati, also Director of the Jakarta Legal Aid Institute, said Garuda should pay a total of Rp 13.7 billion (US\$1.5 million) in compensation for the death, including Rp 4.7 billion in material losses and Rp 9 billion in non-material losses.

Joining hundreds of activists in a rally here Thursday to mark the second anniversary of the murder, Munir's widow Suciwati said she and rights campaigners would write to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono urging him to launch a new independent team immediately to probe the case.

Unlike the previous government-sanctioned team, Suciwati said, the new one should be empowered to summon all people widely suspected of being involved in the murder, including former intelligence officers.

"We came here to seek justice. Justice for Munir means justice for all, and the government of

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has not yet been able to give it to us," Suciwati said in a speech to the protesters outside National Police Headquarters in South Jakarta.

Wearing red T-shirts bearing Munir's picture on the front and the words "Killed because of the truth" on the back, the demonstrators moved to the State Palace in Central Jakarta and the nearby Supreme Court.

Kontras coordinator Usman Hamid said a new team should include police, prosecutors and members of the National Commission on Human Rights. "Munir's assassination is a conspiracy involving Garuda and BIN (National Intelligence Agency) officers," he told the protesters.

Munir was killed on Sept. 7, 2004 in the business-class cabin of a Garuda flight from Jakarta to the Netherlands, where he was to continue his studies. A Dutch autopsy found a lethal dose of arsenic in his blood.

Last year a Garuda pilot, Pollycarpus Priyanto, who was on the flight but off-duty, was sentenced to 14 years in prison for lacing Munir's drink with arsenic. He is appealing the sentence.

Munir's older brother Mufid called on Pollycarpus' wife to join forces with Suciwati in pursuit of justice. "This is because both Pollycarpus and Munir are victims of a well-planned conspiracy," Mufid said in Malang, East Java.

A fact-finding team established by the President concluded the evidence suggested the assassination was carried out in a conspiracy involving BIN. The team reported it had uncovered telephone contacts between Pollycarpus and a former senior BIN official before and after the murder.

Yudhoyono last year promised Suciwati he would do everything in his power to bring those responsible to justice. However, only Pollycarpus has been convicted thus far.

National Police chief Gen. Sutanto has said it will be difficult to uncover the plot unless Pollycarpus, who is suspected of being an intelligence officer, is ready to cooperate. Police interrogated former BIN chief A.M.

Hendropriyono but claimed they had no evidence to charge him, while his former deputy, Muhdi P.R., testified at Polycarpus' trial. Both Hendropriyono and Muhdi denied any wrongdoing.

The pursuit of justice in the Munir case received support Thursday in a letter from human rights defenders in Thailand.

"The failure to bring the persons responsible for the death of such a prominent human rights activist before the justice system sends a message that human rights defenders are very vulnerable and not safe from harm," the letter said. "It also suggests a climate of impunity".

LABOUR ISSUES

Hotel workers rally around colleagues

Jakarta Post - September 13, 2006

Mataram, West Nusa Tenggara — About 80 hotel workers protested near Senggigi Beach on Monday in a show of solidarity with two colleagues recently fired by Senggigi Reef Resort Hotel.

The protesters, employed by dozens of hotels and restaurants along Senggigi, demanded the Senggigi Reef Resort Hotel review the dismissal of the two employees. "They were indiscriminately fired," said Djemmy B. Adrian, a representative of the protesters. He claimed one of the workers in question was fired for failing to keep the area around the main gate of the hotel clean.

"It is really difficult to sweep sandy areas, especially when there is repair work being done on a nearby street," said Sadikin, one of the fired workers. Nur, the other dismissed worker, was reportedly fired because he was considered unable to run the washing machines properly.

The protesters met with Saleh, a representative of the Senggigi Reef Resort Hotel, urging him to sign a letter reversing the dismissals.

Workers demand minimum wage

Jakarta Post - September 11, 2006

Jakarta — Some 500 workers staged a demonstration Sunday in front of the Presidential Palace in Central Jakarta to demand a national minimum wage.

Several labor unions, including the Civil Indonesian Workers Union, Alliance of Indonesian Labor Unions Congress, Tangerang Labor Union Communication Forum and Jabodetabek Labor Union, took part in the rally under the banner of the Alliance of Protesting Workers (ABM).

ABM chairman Anwar Ma'ruf, in a speech during the rally, demanded the central government set a national minimum wage and reject the outsourcing system outlined in a proposed amendment to the 2003 Labor Law.

Currently the country has regional minimum wages. The highest monthly minimum wage is in Jakarta, but it is still below Rp 900,000 (US\$97).

ABM group coordinator Ilhamsyah said an appropriate national minimum wage would be around Rp 1.5 million per month. Anwar said that if the government ignored the workers demand, they would call for a national strike.

The workers, wearing red t-Shirts and carrying posters and banners with slogans such as "Cheap Wage, No"and"Say No to New Form of Colonialism", began the demonstration at 11 a.m. in front of the Hotel Indonesia traffic circle. They then marched to the Presidential Palace.

The protesters, under the watchful eyes of three companies of riot police, disbanded at 4 p.m.

ABM demands standardisation of national wage

Detik.com - September 10, 2006

Jakarta — Around 500 protesters from the Workers Challenge Alliance (ABM) held a demonstration at the Hotel Indonesia (HI) roundabout in Central Jakarta on September 10 demanding a suitable

minimum wage. At present they are awaiting the arrival of other workers following which they plan to march to the State Palace.

ABM is a coalition of several labour organisations including the Indonesian Trade Union Action Committee (KASBI), the Indonesian Civic Trade Union (SPIM), the Tangerang Trade Union Communication Forum (FKSBT) and the Greater Jakarta Trade Union (SBJ).

Arriving at the HI roundabout at 11am, the majority wore red T-shirts and brought a variety of banners with messages such as "Cheap Wages No, A Suitable National Wage Yes", "Imperialism is the Enemy of the People", and "Cancel the Foreign Debt". They also sang the Internationale.

They also brought one huge banner with a number of demands including rejecting revisions to the labour law, demanding the ratification of a pro-people labour law, canceling the foreign debt, calling for the nationalisation of mining industries and other vital industries, a program of national industrialisation and a job creation program for the people.

According to ABM's coordinator for inter-organisational relations, Ilhamsyah, they are demanding that a suitable national wage be set immediately in order that there is a standardisation of the minimum wage by the central government that would be valid for each province.

"This is a pressing demand. If the government had a standard, the provinces could set [their own minimum wage] but it would not be allowed to be less than the national standard. The ideal minimum wage for a worker is 1.5 million rupiah [per month]. But this of course should still wait for the results of a survey", he said. (san)

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Workers Challenge Alliance threatens to hold national strike

Detik.com - September 10, 2006

Jakarta — The Workers Challenge Alliance (ABM) is threatening to hold a national strike if the government fails to increase the national wage and abolish systems of contract labour and outsourcing.

The threat was made by ABM coordinator Anwar Ma'ruf in a speech during a demonstration in front of the State Place on Jl. Medan Merdeka Utara in Central Jakarta on Sunday September 10.

Hundreds of workers have been demonstrating in front of the Palace since 2pm after earlier holding a protest at the Hotel Indonesia roundabout (HI). The action was watched over by around three companies of police from the Metro Jaya regional police and the Central Jakarta district police.

In a speech, Ma'ruf said that ABM is calling on the government to immediately set a standard and suitable national wage before making any revisions to the labour law and voiced the ABM's opposition labour contract systems and outsourcing.

The protesters also expressed their disappointment with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's (SBY) State of the Nation address on August 16, which they said gave the green light to foreign capital to intervene in Indonesia without taking into account the interests of ordinary Indonesian people. "As a result cheap wages are still being paid under the contract labour system and outsourcing", said Ma'ruf.

In addition to this the ABM is also urging the government to cancel the foreign debt. "If SBY and [Vice President Jusuf] Kalla do not respond to [our demands] with regard to a suitable national wage, contract labour systems and outsourcing we will hold a national strike as [took place] not long ago. The earlier [demonstrations] were only a warning", he asserted.

After listening to speeches from several regional worker representatives, at 3.45pm the protesters disbanded. Prior to this during the march from HI, the workers had also distributed leaflets to passers by. (san/djo)

[Translated by James Balowski.]

ABM protests against new forms of colonialism

Media Indonesia - September 10, 2006

Jakarta — On September 10 the Workers Challenge Alliance (ABM) held a demonstration at the State Palace in Jakarta against new forms of colonialism and demanded that the government set a standard national wage.

The action, which had been going on since 1pm, involved more than 100 people from a number of labour organisations affiliated with the ABM including the Indonesian Trade Union Action Committee (KASBI), the Indonesian Labor Union Confederation (GASPERMINDO), the Indonesian Automotive Trade Union (SPOI) and the Indonesian National Front for Labour Struggle (FNPBI).

The protesters, the majority of whom wore red ABM T-shirts, started the action at the Hotel Indonesia roundabout before marching to the State Palace where they gave speeches opposing a number of government policies.

They said that to date, government's national development program has been marked with a dependency on foreign debt that has resulted in policies such as cutting subsidies to electricity, fuel and water and paying cheap wages to workers that the ABM said was a means to enrich the capitalists rather than ordinary people.

The policy of maintaining low wages is a method borrowed from the New Order regime of former President Suharto to attract foreign investment, as if Indonesian workers will voluntarily accept any wage at all as long as they have work.

Establishing a suitable national wage, according to the ABM, means setting workers' wages so that they are no longer just enough for workers to sustain themselves and return to work like machines but a national wage that will allow the working class to live like human beings.

The ABM believes that the roots of the poverty of the working class and the Indonesian people as a

whole are a consequence of the economic system being pursued by the central government that does not side with the working class.

Because of this therefore, the ABM is calling on the working class and all Indonesian people to struggle together to form a new government that has the courage to cancel the foreign debt and nationalise Indonesia's natural resources and vital assets.

"We want the working class to unite to resist this new form of colonialism that oppresses the people", said one of the demonstrators. (Ant/OL-06)

[Translated by James Balowski.]

Government looks to create 15 million jobs

Jakarta Post - September 8, 2006

Tony Hotland, Jakarta — The government is seeking to create jobs for 15 million people over the next three years as part of an expanded poverty alleviation campaign.

Coordinating Minister for the People's Welfare Aburizal Bakrie said Thursday the administration would prioritize two programs to reach that goal: people empowerment and biofuel.

Speaking after a Cabinet meeting in the president's office, Aburizal said the people empowerment program had actually been running since 1998 in 34,200 villages across the country.

The program is expected to generate jobs for 12.5 million people, assuming each project will absorb 250 people in a specific area for three years, said Aburizal.

"The projects work, but we need to extend them to 50,000 more villages by 2009," he said. "The types of projects are determined based on local conditions." The remaining 2.5 million jobs are expected to come as the government opens plantations to support its biofuel program.

Critics have called the anti-poverty projects ineffective, pointing to the steady rise in the number of poor people over the past few years. But Aburizal said that without the programs, poverty would have been even worse.

"We hope that the coordination between the relevant Cabinet ministers can go better. We have agreed that 20 percent of the total state budget allocated for poverty alleviation will go to these two programs," he said.

The government has increased next year's poverty alleviation budget to Rp 51 trillion (US\$5.6 billion), from Rp 43 trillion in 2006 and Rp 21 trillion in 2004. The plans will be drawn up by Aburizal and the money will be managed by other relevant ministries.

The projects, said Aburizal, could come in many forms, such as constructing roads, bridges and irrigation facilities.

"The government will also provide capital for small-scale businesses, allocating Rp 100 million for each village, diversifying the projects so that we can reach more villages," he said.

WAR ON TERROR

Former JI leader warns of new terror attacks this year

Agence France Presse - September 12, 2006

Sydney — A former leader of the Islamic militant group responsible for the deadly Bali bombings has warned that more attacks were likely this year.

Nasir Abbas, who once ran the Philippines branch of Jemaah Islamiah (JI), the Al-Qaeda-linked Southeast Asian terror network, told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation the group aimed to launch an attack every year.

In each of the past four years, JI has been blamed for major attacks between August and October. These are the October 2002 Bali bombings which killed 202 people, the August 2003 Jakarta Marriott Hotel blast, the September 2004 Australian embassy attack and the October 2005

second Bali bombings.

Abbas said Indonesia's most wanted fugitive, Noordin Mohammad Top, had ordered his followers to launch attacks every year. "Noordin had mentioned to his followers that he will do an operation at least once a year. That doesn't mean a big operation," Abbas said. The attacks could come in the form of car bombs or backpack bombs, he said.

Abbas, who was arrested in 2003 and served 10 months in prison for immigration offences in Indonesia, previously had Noordin and the now deceased bombmaker Azahari Husin under his command, ABC said. He is brother-in-law to senior JI member Muklas, who is on death row for his part in the 2002 Bali bombings.

Abbas said JI was weaker than it once was, but that a new instruction manual circulating in Indonesia showed sympathisers how to form independent terrorist cells in a strategy he called "uncontrolled decentralisation". "They can move on their own because they understand that this is their obligation," he said.

Abbas, who was speaking to the ABC's Indonesia correspondent, has cooperated with police and says JI accuses him of being a "traitor".

The Australian government has advised its citizens against travelling to Indonesia since the 2002 attack in Bali that killed 88 Australian holidaymakers.

Another killed in Poso blast

Jakarta Post - September 10, 2006

Indonesia — A woman was killed Saturday night when a bomb went off in Poso, Central Sulawesi, only two days after a homemade bomb exploded and killed a man there.

Witnesses said the victim, 20-year-old Nela Saliango, had spotted a flashlight-shaped object outside her house on Jl. Tabatoki in Kawua. When she picked it up, it exploded. She died in the

hospital.

Central Sulawesi Police spokesman Adj. Sr. Comr. S. Kilat said they were still investigating the incident, which occurred at 8:25 p.m. Police had secured the area and questioned witnesses.

When asked whether Saturday's explosion was related to the blast Thursday in a coastal area of Poso, he said no link had been established, but police were yet to name suspects in Thursday's incident.

As of Saturday, police had not identified the chemicals used in the bomb.

GOVERNMENT/CIVIL SERVICE

Lawmakers oppose rice imports

Jakarta Post - September 9, 2006

Ridwan Max Sijabat, Jakarta — Major factions in the House of Representatives, led by the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), are opposing the government's plan to import 210,000 tons of rice from Vietnam next week.

They argued that the policy will hurt poor farmers and hinder the agricultural revitalization program. However, the opposing factions have yet to decide whether to take action against the government over the planned imports.

PDI-P faction chairman Tjahyo Kumolo said his side would lobby other factions to propose an inquiry into the government's policy. He said the rice import policy was unacceptable because it showed that the government was reluctant to buy rice from local farmers.

"Our survey shows that farmers in 17 rice belts in Java, Sumatra and Sulawesi still have a total of 113,000 tons of rice from the last harvest season, and a new harvest season is nearing, which will sufficiently strengthen the minimum national stock of 750,000 tons," he said Friday.

Tjahyo said before importing rice from Vietnam, the government should purchase it from local farmers to empower them and to support the

national food policy.

National Mandate Party (PAN) chairman Zulkifli Hasan and National Awakening Party (PKB) deputy chairman Yusuf Faisal also voiced opposition.

Bomer Pasaribu, a Golkar Party legislator and analyst from the Bogor Institute of Agriculture, said the planned imports contradicted the government's program to promote self-support in rice. "The core problem is that the government has yet to revitalize the agriculture sector to fight for national reliance on the sector; thus we will continue importing rice," he said.

Trade Minister Mari Elka Pangestu confirmed Thursday that the government would go ahead with a rice import plan later this month to cover national stock shortages. She promised that the imports would not affect local markets because the imported rice would be distributed to provinces prone to rice shortages.

However, Zulkifli said rice prices have dropped by Rp 200 to Rp 400 per kilogram in almost all local markets this week because traders have been reluctant to buy rice from farmers due to the import policy.

Meanwhile, Maruahal Silalahi, a lawmaker from President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's Democrat Party, defended the government's policy, saying the rice importation was an appropriate decision during a shortage in the national rice reserves.

Country better under Yudhoyono: Survey

Jakarta Post - September 15, 2006

Jakarta — In contrast to Indonesian pollsters who have recently reported poor approval ratings for the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono administration, an Australian pollster said Thursday the public felt the government had done a good job of improving conditions in Indonesia.

Roy Morgan Research, an Australian market research and public opinion polling company, found in its

Good Governance Monitor that the Yudhoyono government is continuing to improve its performance on four key issues: trust, management, corruption and democracy.

"Only 39 percent of respondents now agree with the statement, "I don't trust the current government", down from 41 percent at the end of 2005," the survey reported.

Debnath Guharoy, the Asian regional director for Roy Morgan Research, said that as the public recovered from the painful impact of twin fuel price hikes in 2005 it had once again thrown its weight behind the government.

"Despite natural calamities in Indonesia and spiraling fuel prices across the globe, that's a creditable outcome. I say that knowing that Indonesians are easy to please and ready to forgive," Guharoy said.

Every 90 days Roy Morgan Research interviews more than 6,000 respondents aged 14 and older, randomly picked across Indonesia's 16 provinces and covering more than 90 percent of the country's population.

The pollster interviewed 6,233 people during the April-June quarter. It talks to more than 25,000 respondents annually.

The survey found 60 percent of respondents believed the government had done a good job of running the country.

The belief that "corruption is a major problem affecting this country" remains entrenched among the overwhelming majority of Indonesians.

Responding to popular indictments and unpopular verdicts, this measurement dipped only marginally in the second quarter of 2006 and remained close to 90 percent.

The public has also grown comfortable with democracy. "Seventy-six percent agree with the statement that democracy is working in Indonesia," the survey found.

A number of other pollsters, however, have painted a different picture of the Yudhoyono government's performance.

A poll done by the Indonesian Survey Circle (LSI) between April 23 and April 27 found that only 37 percent of the public approved of Yudhoyono's job performance, the lowest rating he has registered in his 18 months in office.

Just 37.9 percent said they were satisfied with Yudhoyono's overall performance, a nose dive from the 79.7 percent recorded 18 months before, when he first assumed office.

A report from the World Bank and its financial arm, the International Financial Corporation (IFC), has concluded that Indonesia remains one of the more difficult places in the world to do business.

In terms of friendliness to foreign investors, Indonesia ranked 135th of 175 countries surveyed in the report.

'Bureaucracy, parties striving for recentralization'

Jakarta Post - September 9, 2006

A survey by the Civil Society Alliance for Democracy (Yappika) discovered that the implementation of regional autonomy between 2001 and 2005 gave rise to ethnocentrism and tribalism. One of the key researchers in the survey, Eko Prasodjo of the University of Indonesia, recently talked to The Jakarta Post's M. Taufiqurrahman on the pitfalls and fallacies of decentralization. Below are some excerpts from the interview:

Question: Can you tell us about some other interesting findings from the survey?

Answer: Among the interesting findings are the fact that discrepancies prevail between the resources that local governments have and the greater authorities given by the central government. In most regencies we surveyed, we found 85 percent of their budgets were used up paying civil servants while local income makes up only between 5 and 10 percent. So providing quality services is the last thing on local

bureaucrats' minds.

Such a condition was aggravated by the penchant of incumbent leaders to use resources as a means to meet their political ends. In some regencies, agriculture has lagged behind other sectors as the bureaucracy failed to deliver much-needed pesticides, seeds and fertilizers and, as a result, farmers resorted to illegal logging, for instance. Even the bureaucracy of the New Order regime could perform better. In some regions, such as resource-rich regencies in Kalimantan, we discovered that an authoritarian government like the New Order has been on the rise.

There are, however, shining examples of how decentralization has meant better services for the public, such as what we found in Solok, Sragen, Kebumen and Tanah Datar, just to name a few. But it depends largely on elected political leaders. How progressive they are.

One of the recommendations of the survey is that the supervisory role of provincial administrations be strengthened.

As the law now stands, the supervisory role of the provincial government has already been abolished. The hierarchy between the provincial administrations and the regencies has also been severed. As a consequence, regency leaders now turn directly to the central government and the central government gives money directly to the regencies. This is, I think symptomatic of a return to centralism.

In my view, centralization should stop at the provincial administration, because once the door is open for officials from regencies to come to Jakarta and haggle with the bureaucracy, it will just be a return to the New Order regime.

What is the possibility of a return to a centralized government?

There are two entities that want to bring an end to decentralization: political parties and the bureaucracy. The central boards of political parties that serve as patrons for their local chapters have bemoaned the fact that they hold little sway over local politics. The bureaucracy at national level also suffers a similar fate. It

no longer gets the bulk of the state budget that had been shared with local governments.

Is it possible for the two entities to make concerted efforts and bring about a centralized regime?

Very likely. If within five years the implementation of regional autonomy fails to bring any good to the public and the central government thinks that local governments are no longer capable of assuming their law-given authorities, then the door for recentralization will be open.

But the central government should also share the blame for producing numerous laws and regulations that contradict one another?

Indeed, but it has gone on for a long time because a large number of laws that regulate individual sectors are the legacy of the New Order regime, while the law on decentralization was produced only recently. But, there are also examples in which the present government could be faulted for creating legal confusion.

The regional autonomy law clearly stipulates the land issue is the domain of local governments, but the central government recently issued a regulation to retract such an authority. During the survey, we also received complaints from local bureaucrats that they had problems catching up with the ever-changing regulations.

Most of them didn't even study the regulations when the central government decided to replace them. I think it has to do with the rent-seeking and budget-maximizing efforts made by the bureaucracy of the central government.

ENVIRONMENT

More muddy misery in Sidoarjo

Jakarta Post - September 16, 2006

Indra Harsaputra, Sidoarjo — Two ponds built to contain the Sidoarjo mud flow burst Friday, forcing more residents to flee the area, while protesters blocked the nearby Surabaya-Gempol turnpike.

Friday's pond burst was the eighth since work began to stop the flow of mud from the Lapindo Brantas gas exploration site that started on May 19. It left the Mindi and Pejarakan villages in Jabon district covered in mud, which had reached a depth of about two meters as of 4 p.m. Friday.

The mud has spilled into rice fields and irrigation ditches in the area and reached Besuki village, three kilometers away.

When the ponds burst, Pejarakan residents Saiful and Siti started packing their valuables into a borrowed pedicab, but before they had finished their house had been inundated with mud.

"My wife keeps crying. We want to live safely and we don't want to live in a shelter because it will be bad for our children's development. Lapindo is killing us slowly (with the mud)," said Saiful, a 34-year-old father of two.

He said he did not know where his family would live. The Sioarjo administration has announced that all displaced persons need to leave the temporary shelter at Porong market before Idul Fitri in October.

Many people are concerned that other ponds could give way under the mud. A team from the Surabaya Institute of Technology earlier recommended the ponds have walls up to four meters high, but most are now topping out at around six meters.

Riano, who works at the Porong market shelter, said hundreds of Mindi and Pejarakan villagers had come to leave their belongings there.

"They haven't yet registered to live in the shelter. They're still confused and some are preparing to stage a protest to block the Surabaya-Gempol turnpike," he told The Jakarta Post on Friday.

The protesters who blocked the turnpike on Friday also attempted to damage some of its facilities. A local journalist was threatened by some demonstrators, while motorists attempting to pass through the area were angered by the road block.

"We're not entertaining objects shown on television. We're not celebrities, we need serious

attention," a protester told journalists.

Separately, East Java Police special crime chief Adj. Sr. Comr. I Nyoman Sukena said Friday he would hand over the files of three suspects in the mudflow case, Lapindo drilling supervisors Subie, Slamet and Rahenold, to the East Java Prosecutor's Office.

Currently, there are 12 suspects implicated in the disaster, although none have been detained because they are involved in the containment effort.

"This case not a simple robbery case where a thief stole a chicken. This is a big case and we want no mistakes. We didn't set a deadline to put them in detention because all of the suspects are cooperative," Nyoman said.

Green groups worry about tests' longevity

Jakarta Post - September 16, 2006

Adianto P. Simamora, Jakarta — The Jakarta administration's emissions testing campaign ends next week, but there are signs that the city plans to issue further regulations to enforce testing.

Environmental activists warn that the campaign will be ineffective unless the administration makes an example of those caught violating the emissions testing regulation and takes them to court.

Damantoro, campaign program officer at clean air project Swisscontact, said the administration needed to focus on issuing a supporting decree that would provide technical guidelines for officers carrying out field investigations of emissions law violators.

He said any further delay in issuing such a decree would discourage the public from putting their vehicles through emissions tests. "It is time to enforce the regulation," he said Wednesday.

Generation for Clean Air chairman Gana Sugantana said he agreed with Damantoro and believed the public were waiting for the administration to take

real action. "Attention must be focused on law enforcement. The public campaign on emissions testing has been adequate," he said.

Gana said his office had performed emissions tests on hundreds of thousands of private cars across the city. The tests are part of the air pollution control bylaw the administration passed last year.

Under the bylaw, which also banned smoking in certain areas and required public transportation to use compressed natural gas, people who fail to have emissions tests conducted on their cars face up to six months in jail or a fine of Rp 50 million.

The administration said the bylaw would need at least 25 gubernatorial decrees to support its implementation. So far, only one has been released, a smoking ban that was announced in April.

Governor Sutiyoso ordered the Jakarta Environmental Management Board (BPLHD) to organize a mass publicity campaign to remind people about the emissions tests, the last free round of which began on Sept. 11 and will end on Sept. 22.

"I don't know what's next. We haven't finished drafting the emissions testing decree," BPLHD air control division head Yosiono Anwar Supalal said.

He said the administration is considering involving all parties, including businesses and the public, in taking responsibility for the emissions testing program. "We learned from past experiences of financial problems after the smoking ban took effect in April," he said.

The administration has held several trials of hundreds of people caught smoking in restricted areas, however, as mass trials cost around Rp 30 million and 50 million to hold, it is expensive to have regular raids enforcing the ban.

The BPLHD has said it plans to supply free certificates and "emission free" stickers to authorized auto garages, as well as free training sessions in performing emissions tests. The city currently has 115 garages and 239 technicians authorized to perform emissions tests.

BPLHD head Budirama Natakusumah said the printing of the stickers and certificates could be handed over to the workshops themselves.

"It's one possible option. We'll just issue a serial number for the stickers or certificates," he told The Jakarta Post on Wednesday while observing emissions tests being held at the Indonesian Christian University in Cawang, East Jakarta.

The administration has distributed 20,000 certificates and stickers to garages since launching the first emissions testing campaign in February.

"We've been out of certificates and stickers since July. We don't have any more money for it as it wasn't included in the city budget," he said.

He said the legal enforcement of emissions tests would be done in stages. "It's just like when using motorcycle helmets became mandatory, or seat belts, which took a long time. We have to change people's attitudes first," Budirama said.

He said his office was still discussing with the police the possibility of emissions tests being a requirement when cars were being registered.

Jakarta talks tough on environment

Jakarta Post - September 15, 2006

Adianto P. Simamora, Jakarta — While in the past businesses in Jakarta have largely had their way on environmental issues, that could change as the city administration discusses tightening rules on development.

The Jakarta government is currently reviewing procedures for businesses applying for Environmental Impact Analysis (Amdal) approval. The administration may also begin requiring developers to put up money to ensure compliance with all environmental requirements.

"We are still formulating a mechanism," Environmental Management Board head Budirama

Natakusumah told The Jakarta Post on Thursday.

Offering an example, Budirama said if a company was required to establish a waste management facility as part of a development, it would have to deposit money in the amount of the projected cost of constructing the facility.

"If the developers meet all the requirements, we will return the money. If they fail, we will use the money to build the facilities for them," he said.

He said in the past businesses violated Amdal requirements because of the lack of sanctions. "We can no longer allow such practices to take place. It will just further damage the city's environment," he said.

Andreas Pramudianto from the University of Indonesia, who is also a government consultant for the Environmental Impact Analysis, expressed doubts over the proposal.

"The problems are where will the money be deposited and how will it be returned. The administration must create a clear mechanism. This is about money, we have to be careful," he told the Post.

A 2002 gubernatorial decree on the Amdal requires developers to inform the public of proposed projects and consult with residents in areas affected by the development as part of feasibility studies necessary for Amdal approval.

The Amdal is meant to help the city administration decide on whether to allow or reject a project.

However, Andreas said both the city and businesses largely ignored the environmental analysis. "It's a poorly kept secret that many existing establishments have yet to have their Amdal documents approved," he said.

While many environmentalists initially welcomed the busway development, they complain that the administration failed to perform an Amdal. The result, they say, has been a worsening of traffic along several busway corridors as a result of the failure to perform proper feasibility studies.

When asked about these charges, Budirama of the

Environmental Management Board said the busway was a special exception because it was "an urgent project".

The central government also has a special commission to audit environmental impact analyses before awarding permits to businesses.

However, a survey by the State Ministry for the Environment released in May showed the commission had done little to stop environmental degradation in the country.

The survey found 75 percent of the 474 municipalities in Indonesia had no Amdal commissions. Of the original 119 Amdal commissions set up around the country, only half are still functioning and more than three-quarters of the 119 are issuing documents of "poor" or "extremely poor" quality.

Fifty major loggers free abroad

Tempo Interactive - September 13, 2006

Badriah and Erwin Dariyanto, Jakarta — Around 50 major illegal loggers and thousands of small illegal loggers are still free in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and China.

"The Illegal logging business network is actually there," said Malam Sabat Kaban, Forestry Minister, after meeting with Vice President Jusuf Kalla at the vice presidential office yesterday (12/9).

According to him, those outlawed have been included in the list of people prevented from going abroad, sent by Indonesian National Police to the Directorate General of Immigration at the Justice and Human Rights Department.

During the meeting, the vice president asked about the number of illegal logger suspects in the list of wanted people which has been distributed by the Forestry Department.

Kaban explained, the illegal loggers use false identities so they are difficult to catch.
"Sometimes a person can have three names and own

three passports."

Illegal loggers who have forest concession rights, such as Adelin Lis, who was captured in Beijing, China last Friday, are easier to catch.

Adelin, Director of PT Inata Timber and PT Keang Nam, is now being interviewed at North Sumatra Regional Police in Medan after escaping to China in February. Adelin is an illegal logger suspect in Mandailing Natal, suspected of causing the state to suffer a loss of Rp230 trillion.

Other illegal loggers who have been captured include Ai Peng in Riau and Mulyadi.

However, according to Kaban, A Seng in Medan has not been arrested. "There are two people named A Seng, both haven't been arrested."

Kaban is targeting that fugitives in Jambi and Kalimantan must be captured this year. He also claimed there are drastic declines up to 80 percent of the log shipping volume and log stealing frequency, especially in Kalimantan.

At almost every main river on the island, there is no more open log shipping. It's a similar situation downstream and upstream of Batanghari River in Jambi and Gaung River in Siak.

Sand quarrying raises tempers, damages locality

Jakarta Post - September 12, 2006

Multa Fidrus, Tangerang — Simpang Kampong, a small coastal village in Mauk district in the north of Tangerang regency, has a seemingly inexhaustible supply of sand.

Covering a few hectares, dozens of people, every day, illegally quarry sand there. These people, who work in groups of five to 10, come from neighboring villages such as Marga Mulya, Ketapang, Tanjung Anom and Karang Serang.

The quarriers, who dig up to 10 meters into the ground and create deep holes as large as a football pitch, seem to be unconcerned about the

possibility of a landslide burying them alive.

Making a quick profit is the only thing on their mind. They don't care at all, even though they realize that their activity has damaged the environment and disrupted irrigation for farmers.

"It's too dangerous for you to enter the quarry. Workers will attack any journalist who tries to enter and take pictures," Sarmili, a local, told The Jakarta Post recently.

The Post observed several small channels on the floor of the large hole, where workers move sand with the help of a powerful water jet. A motor blows the sand from the dredging site onto the ground where dozens of workers and trucks await.

Quarrying, Sarmili says, has resulted in the erosion of more than 10,000 cubic meters of land in the village, on which rice was formerly grown.

"We have repeatedly filed complaints with the district office over the dredging, but it's all to no avail because local officials are bribed to look the other way by the operation's owner," he said.

Hundreds of residents from Tegal Kunir Lor, Banyuasin, Ketapang, Marga Mulya villages and Kampong Simpang have repeatedly protested the operation because it has disrupted irrigation in the past three years.

The villagers' main source of income is agriculture. When their protests were ignored, angry residents attacked workers at the mine, which is owned by Jakarta-based businessman Herman Wijaya.

They set fire to the workers' dormitory and destroyed pipelines and machines in April 2004. The police then arrested six local residents following a brawl with workers during the assault.

They were charged with inciting villagers to attack the mine workers and destroy on-site facilities, although two villagers were attacked by the workers and were rushed to hospital with machete wounds.

Sukwadi, from Marga Mulya, said that the sand dredging operation had also changed the ecosystem

and disrupted ground water supply in the village since it began in 2000.

"The miners have violated Bylaw No. 20/2004 on public order and security. But they have continued their operations, despite forcible closure by the administration," he said.

Tangerang regent Ismet Iskandar issued written orders to the public order agency to close down unlawful sand quarries in Cisauk, Curug, Legok and Kresek districts, but business is still as usual at present.

"This is a matter of basic survival; we need money to feed our families," quarry workers replied angrily when the Post asked them why they continued.

One of them, Usman, 28, is from Ketapang village. He began digging for sand in 2001. Before that he was a fisherman, but fuel price increases caused him to shift to sand quarrying to keep body and soul together.

"If the Tangerang regental administration bans quarrying and closes the site here we won't have any source of income. We make only Rp 15,000 to Rp 20,000 a day — just enough to buy three kilograms of rice," he said.

Work at the site usually runs from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day. The sand is sold to a middleman for Rp 50,000 for a small truckload and Rp 150,000 per medium-sized load. Each person working at the site earns an average of Rp 20,000 a day.

The middleman then sells the sand to another middleman for Rp 75,000 to Rp 125,000 per small load and Rp 175,000 to Rp 250,000 per medium truckload.

"I sell the sand at Rp 75,000 per cubic meter. Sometimes I can sell four truckloads a day. Recently, demand has been quite low. I hire five men to carry the sand. Each is paid Rp 10,000 a day," said Samrah, 45, a middleman.

It is clear that the quarrying has damaged the environment. This could also lead to devastating landslides, particularly for those living in neighboring villages.

It is feared that if the operation continues, farmers living near the area will suffer from water shortages and many wells used by locals will dry up.

Environmental damage caused by quarrying is a hot topic of debate at plenary meetings of the Tangerang regental legislative council. The council tends to blame the administration for being too soft in dealing with the quarrying problem.

However, the administration argues that it cannot do much because the people involved in quarrying are poor and are simply trying to survive.

Head of the regental public order agency Odang Masduki has his own explanation as to why nothing is being done to put a halt to the illegal activity across the regency. "We closed the site six times between 2004 and this year. We erected a gate at the entrance but the quarrying continues apace. We are powerless against hundreds, possibly thousands, of illegal quarriers. It all depends on the land," he said.

It seems that the local administration has yet to find a way to address the problem of environmental damage in its area. Instead, it is too busy blaming others.

Official demands Lapindo stop dumping mud in river

Jakarta Post - September 12, 2006

Indra Harsaputra, Sidoarjo — Sidoarjo Regent Win Hendrarso demanded Monday that Lapindo Brantas Inc., which owns the gas exploration well that has spewed out a torrent of hot mud since May 29, stop disposing of the mud into Porong River.

The regent said the company did not have the necessary permission from the regional administration and State Minister for the Environment Rachmat Witoelar.

Last week an official from Lapindo denied the mud was being disposed of in the river, although the

company had earlier suggested it might do so, citing an emergency.

The foul-smelling mud has submerged 400 hectares of rice fields, homes, schools and the turnpike linking East Java's capital, Surabaya, with surrounding cities. Some 9,000 people from at least seven villages have been forced to evacuate and a number of embankments built to check the flow of the hot toxic mud have collapsed.

"I have ordered the regional environment office to stop the disposal (of the mud)," Regent Win said.

The mud was still being channeled into the river as of Monday afternoon.

Pressure on the company and the administration to get rid of the mud has been mounting, despite protests by the owners of thousands of shrimp hatcheries, for which the coastal town is famous.

An official from the Public Works Ministry said the government and Lapindo had agreed the mud could be disposed of before being treated, given the seriousness of the situation.

"The government and Lapindo agreed to this after a number of meetings," said Aris Setyadi, the head of the public works team assigned to overcome the mudflow problem. He said Lapindo had ordered four mobile pumps to channel the mud into the river, with a capacity to carry 300 liters of water per second.

As of Monday the mud continued to flow at an estimated 45,000 cubic meters a day.

Also on Monday Bloomberg news agency reported that PT Medco Energi Internasional, the country's largest oil company by market value, would set aside money to pay for damage caused by the flow of mud at the gas exploration well, which it partly owns. Medco may have to pay as much as US\$23.2 million based on its 32 percent share in the field.

Lapindo estimates the cost of damages at \$100 million, Medco's president Hilmi Panigoro said. Insurance payouts are capped at \$27.5 million, he said. At current estimates, the payments may account for 31 percent of the Jakarta-based

company's 2005 profit and may cut its earnings and debt rating.

"To be prudent, we will make a provision... (and) we will do our best to protect the interests of our shareholders," Panigoro said in an interview, Bloomberg reported. The company will set aside money in the last quarter of this year and the first quarter of 2007, he said, without disclosing the amount.

Costs to put an end to the mudflow disaster will total at least \$100 million, Rawindra, general manager of Lapindo's East Java unit, said in a phone interview Monday.

"The spending to drill three relief wells, to search for and seal the mud source alone will be \$78 million," he said. "There are plenty of other damage claims" from residents in five villages and 17 factories inundated by the mudflow, Rawindra said.

Australia's Santos Ltd., which owns an 18 percent share in the area, said on Aug. 23 it took a one-time charge of A\$19 million (\$14.4 million) to pay for the damage. Lapindo, owned by PT Energi Mega Persada, has 50 percent of the Brantas block, where the mudflow started.

Under normal circumstances, the government would pay for 70 percent of exploration and development costs in the block and get the same share of production revenue, according to an agreement with contractors, who will pay the remaining costs and get 30 percent of revenue.

That will not apply to the costs resulting from the Lapindo incident, Luluk Sumiarso, the Energy Ministry's director general of oil and gas, said in a phone interview.

"We will cover the costs of drilling the exploration well, but not those caused by the mudflow incident," Sumiarso said. If the government agrees to pay 70 percent of the uninsured damages, Medco's share will be \$7 million, Panigoro said.

Paranormals called in to end mudflow

Jakarta Post - September 10, 2006

Indra Harsaputra, Sidoarjo — After midnight, a site near the center of Sidoarjo's mudflows remains busy — not with workers trying to stop the constant gray streams, but with mystics attempting to use their supernatural powers to end the disaster for a Rp 100 million (US\$10,869) prize.

"Stop filming please, I can't concentrate on calling the spirit at the source of the mudflow," Maisaroh, a psychic from the East Java town of Ngawi, said in Javanese to a photographer from a foreign news service and to The Jakarta Post on Saturday.

The photographer looked confused and apologized. Maisaroh started to move away from his camera.

"I could have called the spirit around (Lapindo Brantas Inc.'s) Banjar Panji-1 well, but the spirit left upon learning you would take a picture," she said. "I'll try calling it again so I can communicate with it."

Nearby, another psychic, Hobir, 50, was crouched over busily chanting, then threw sand and stone into ponds built to contain the mudflow.

"The sand and stone were taken... with God's guidance from the cemetery of Sunan Ampel in Surabaya and of Sunan Giri in Gresik," he told the Post, referring to two of the nine legendary clerics who spread Islam in Java.

Hobir, who works days on a tobacco farm, said he hoped he had adequate powers to stop the mess from spreading. "I've had a blessing from Gus Dur (former president Abdurrahman Wahid)... If I win, I and my family will live in a house," he said.

Maisaroh and Hobir are two of 50 psychics taking part in the contest, organized by the Kedung Bendo village head, a wealthy businessman named Hasan.

The competition has attracted psychics from many

cities in East Java and from further afield, including Jakarta and Medan. All are trying their luck to stop the hot mud, which has been gushing out of Lapindo's exploration well since May 29.

The organizer has not collected any registration fees for the contestants nor provided them with accommodation; they only get free water, and are required to bring their own equipment.

"Some of the psychics are scary-looking, but there are also those who are gentle and polite. But none of them have stopped the mud," said Titus, the contest's coordinator. He said the competition had received such a large response that the committee had to limit the number of participants and separate them into several groups. The committee has not set a deadline for contestants to end the flows.

In a screening process, each psychic had to pass a test: turn off a water faucet left on by the organizer with only their supernatural powers. "With the test, many candidates had to go back home. How can they stop a mudflow if they can't even shut off a faucet," Titus said.

The contest is one of the more unusual attempts to end the disaster, which has left more than 9,000 people homeless and more than 1,800 people out of work.

"Many people may not accept that we have supernatural powers," said Dony Harahap, a psychic from Jakarta. "But (from my work) it is clear that the mudflow can only be stopped if the government and Lapindo end their sinful acts, which are affecting the people."

Lapindo dumps water into river: Observers say

Jakarta Post - September 9, 2006

Indra Harsaputra, Sidoarjo — Lapindo Brantas Inc. is dumping contaminated water from the Sidoarjo mudflow disaster directly into the Porong River without treating it first as promised, witnesses claim. The company has denied it has dumped

untreated water into the river.

Witnesses claimed they had seen water from retaining ponds being channeled directly into the river. The two pipes were connected to the river from one of the ponds near Pejarakan Jabon village. Three pumps have also been installed to distribute water from the pond to the river.

A TV journalist, Medi, said the pipes were set up in Thursday by soldiers from the Kepanjen battalion in Malang. Of the two pipes, only one was operating Friday, he said.

State Minister of Environment Rachmat Witoelar earlier said the water must not be dumped into seas or rivers without being treated. The ministry earlier said the mud was non-toxic and safe, despite a study published in a government magazine that said the mud contained a number of dangerous chemicals.

Meanwhile, Lapindo management said the new mudflow source spotted Thursday in Jatirejo village was likely caused by downward pressure of the mud caused by the retaining ponds the company had built.

The company's East Java general manager Rawindra said the new materials used to strengthen the ponds likely stopped the mud from flowing up its normal route. Instead the mud pushed through cracks in the ground and found its way to the surface in a new place, he said.

Earlier, former chairman of the Indonesian Geologists Association, Andang Bachtiar, blamed the emergence of the new mudflow on what he called a natural "mud volcano" phenomenon.

However, BP Migas deputy head Trijana Kartoatmojo played down the "mud-volcano" theory. The government was not saying this was the cause of the disaster, he said. "It's hard to clearly define the cause of mudflow since experts have different opinions about it but currently, we're only trying to stop it," he said.

Separately, director of the Indonesia Cares NGO, Syafruddin Ngulma Simeulue, accused Lapindo of intentionally spreading the "mud volcano" concept as a public relations strategy so it could escape

blame for the disaster.

Syafruddin said Coordinating Minister for the People's Welfare Aburizal Bakrie, whose family owns a controlling share the company, should resign from Cabinet.

"I hope President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and his ministers are not reluctant to make a decision regarding this mudflow problem," he said.

HEALTH & EDUCATION

Teachers claim intimidation for disclosing exam fraud

Jakarta Post - September 15, 2006

M. Taufiqurrahman, Jakarta — Dozens of teachers complained to the House of Representatives on Thursday that local officials had intimidated them after they uncovered ugly truths behind the national exam.

The teachers claimed they were dismissed, threatened or jailed for exposing cheating and other illicit practices involving principals and government officials during the exam in May.

"In Garut, West Java, for instance, teachers, parents and students who filed police reports about the cheating were treated like criminals. Some of them were put behind bars for three months," Ade Irawan of Indonesian Corruption Watch (ICW) told a hearing of House Commission X on education and culture.

ICW collaborated with the teachers on an investigation of illicit practices during the exam. Their report found that in major cities like Jakarta, Tangerang, Depok, Bogor, Bandung, Medan and Makassar, teachers were involved in leaking answers in advance of the exams.

A number of tactics were allegedly employed by the teachers, including using Short Message Service (SMS) or simply distributing a copy of the answers.

The teachers said the Garut administration was directly involved in raising its students' scores

out of the belief that a high percentage of students graduating with good grades would help boost the regency's image.

The report alleged the regency threatened high school principals with dismissal if they failed to improve students' grades. It found school staffers bowed to the pressure and inflated the students' scores.

Some teachers later filed complaints about their treatment with the Inspectorate General of the National Education Ministry. The report said despite evidence of rampant cheating, a team from the ministry claimed to have found few irregularities.

Members of House Commission X said the teachers' complaints would make it difficult for the House to authorize a nationwide exam for 2007.

"The policy of holding a national exam contradicts the national education system," House Commission X member Masduki Baidowi of the National Awakening Party commented, saying the system specified that education would be left in the hands of individual schools and teachers.

Baidowi said Commission X would try to persuade the House budget committee not to fund the national exam.

National Education Minister Bambang Sudibyo has said that the future of the national exam depends on the verdict of a class action lawsuit in Jakarta filed by students who said they were victimized by the exams.

Bogor students protest fee increases

Jakarta Post - September 14, 2006

Theresia Sufa, Bogor — Almost a thousand Bogor Institute of Agriculture (IPB) students rallied in front of the campus' rectory Wednesday demanding a recent decision to raise tuition fees be reversed. The institution recently raised its fees from Rp 750,000 per semester to Rp 1.2 million per

semester, saying the extra funds would be used to provide cross subsidies for poor students.

Students gathered at the IPB's Graha Wisuda Auditorium and marched to the rectory at around 10 a.m. and demanded to see IPB rector Ahmad Ansori Mattjik.

Only when several students fainted in the midst of the crush in front of the building's closed entrance did campus security allow the students to enter the rectory. Mattjik and the institute's deputy rectors then met with student body head Jaenal Abidin.

In the meeting, Jaenal said the scheme was flawed because it was charged on the basis of students parents' incomes and ignored their financial earning capacity and how many people the family had to support. He added that the manner in which additional fees were determined was inconsistent as each faculty determines its own charges.

Jaenal also said that the IPB needed to be more transparent in its management of fees and had to guarantee that poor students would be entitled to an affordable education.

In response, however, Mattjik said that the police would not be changed and the subsidy scheme would still be applied. although he added that poor students would not have to pay for admission.

Deputy rector Herry Suhardiyanto said parents were often dishonest about their incomes during student registration.

"Most parents only write that their income is more than Rp 1 million on the registration form. Many other demand a reduction in school fees," he said, adding that around 400 parents had asked for a discount this year.

The school reported that 81 students had been exempt from paying fees in last year's intake.

OPINION & ANALYSIS

Welcoming Ramadhan with love

Jakarta Post Editorial - September 16, 2006

The beginning of Ramadhan is only one week away and most Muslims traditionally welcome it with great pleasure. However, for many Jakartans, especially those working in cafes, night clubs and entertainment centers, the coming of the fasting month can mean fear, chaos and the loss of income.

Owners of many nightspots expect the beginning of Ramadhan to be blighted with violence, a time when groups waving religious banners raid their premises and demand all be shut down.

These groups, taking the law into their own hands, vandalize these establishments, causing them to close and leaving the owners and workers helpless.

These illegal acts are repeated every year and the authorities are for some reason unable to stop the violence. Will this year be any different?

Jakarta Governor Sutiyoso has asked the police to act quickly and sternly to stop any attacks on entertainment centers. Jakarta Police chief Insp. Gen. Adang Firman, meanwhile, threatens to deal harshly with those violating the law.

According to Sutiyoso, a 2004 government decree on tourism, clearly rules on the operational hours of entertainment centers — cafes, restaurants, bars, pool and karaoke halls and massage parlors. The decree also prohibits all these places from operating a day before Ramadhan starts and during the Idul Fitri and Idul Adha holidays.

Cafes, pool and karaoke halls and bars will probably be allowed to operate only between 8:30 p.m. and 12:30 a.m. during the fasting month. These regulations do not apply to similar entertainment centers run by star-rated hotels.

Sutiyoso emphasized that attacks on any of these establishments were against the law but stopped short of saying the city would do anything to stop it: "The city administration has no authority to take action against the radical groups. It is the police that must handle that," he said.

Sutiyoso's statements and Adang Firman's promise to take stern actions against the violators sound comforting. The ball, it seems, is in the police's court.

One hopes these promises will be honored. It would be extremely unfortunate if there were a repeat of past incidents when the police stood idly by and watched radicals smash up nightclubs and bars, leaving the employees and owners helpless.

Hopefully the nightclub owners have made preparations against worst-case scenarios and that they have followed the law by ensuring their workers are compensated for any periods of unemployment during the fasting month.

It is also worth noting that Deputy Governor Fauzi Bowo has anticipated trouble by meeting with the radicals concerned and discussing the implementation of the decree. Fauzi said the meetings would become a forum where everybody would hopefully reach a similar interpretation of the regulations. It is hoped, therefore, that the fasting month will begin with peace and tranquility, instead of violence and brutality.

Still, there are questions that linger. Why do the groups always target nightclubs and entertainment centers in their endeavors to "uphold the purity of Ramadhan". And why do they prefer violence to a peaceful approach?

Closing nightspots could also be interpreted as a prohibition on prostitution, and the consumption of alcoholic drinks, which are forbidden by Islam. But if these radical groups are so concerned about these vices, why do they take action only in Ramadhan. Could there be other motives at play apart from religion?

According to our Constitution, all citizens in this country have the right to work and prosper without fear of layoffs, intimidation or violence. Could the gubernatorial decree, which closes nightspots during Ramadhan, contradict the Constitution?

If their main concern is to clean densely populated Jakarta from prostitution and alcohol consumption, shouldn't the authorities properly enforce the existing ban on the former, and set about canvassing the public for the support for the latter?

One could also ask, if the sale of alcohol is so bad, why is it that it is only "banned" during the

fasting month? And what about prostitution, normally practiced so openly in certain areas of the city.

It is time for the city to properly protect those most at risk during the holy month, to ensure that it is celebrated in a civilized and peaceful way.

Prosecuting the prosecutors

Jakarta Post Editorial - September 14, 2006

The ongoing showdown within the Attorney General's Office could raise further doubts about its commitment to law enforcement.

Jakarta Prosecutor's Office chief Rusdi Taher officially challenged Tuesday a decision by Attorney General Abdul Rahman Saleh to suspend him in connection with sentence irregularities in the case of suspects caught with drugs.

The dispute comes on the heels of an incident Monday at the House of Representatives, in which a student hurled a rotten egg at Deputy Attorney General for Special Crimes Hendarman Supandji prior to a hearing.

Such disrespect is intolerable. But such acts may also be motivated by feelings of impatience, frustration or perhaps loss of confidence in the AGO, which is expected to uphold the law without compromise.

The tension brewing between Abdul Rahman and Rusdi has become the embodiment of every ailment besetting the AGO. The institution has long been associated with the country's corrupt judicial system, where justice has a price.

It is understandable if Abdul Rahman, as the boss, prevented Rusdi on Monday from clarifying his complaints about constantly being under "pressure from the top" not to come down hard in certain cases. But Abdul Rahman cannot hide behind institutional ethics to cover up practices that would keep him from realizing his post-inauguration pledge to build an independent law

enforcement agency.

Many suspect Rusdi is just a fall guy fighting back but what he has revealed to the media needs to be verified. The senior prosecutor claimed that, just one-and-a-half years after taking office, he had repeatedly been pressured by his superiors or top government officials to help suspects get light sentences or have their cases dropped.

Rusdi was relieved from his professional duties after the AGO found him guilty of violating the code of conduct for prosecutors. The AGO's internal affairs office had discovered two drafts of a sentence demand for Hariono Agus Tjahjono, who was on trial for trafficking 20 kilograms of shabu-shabu or crystal methamphetamine. Rusdi denied having ordered the prosecutors in charge of the case to seek three years' jail, far from the maximum penalty of death.

Letting the cat out of the bag, Rusdi said top officials at the State Secretariat had put pressure on him to drop a corruption case in the deal to use state assets in Kemayoran for business interests involving businesswoman Hartati Murdaya. He also said the deputy attorney general for special crimes had asked him to seek one-and-a-half years' jail for Jakarta Elections Commission chief M. Taufik in a graft case.

Not long ago, two prosecutors faced a disciplinary hearing for allegedly extorting Ahmad Djunaidi, the former president director of state social security firm Jamsostek, in exchange for a light sentence. Police have named the prosecutors suspects and detained them, pending their trial.

The so-called court mafia — involving prosecutors, judges, court clerks and lawyers — has made its presence felt, but most of the time it is difficult to prove its existence. Only a few cases have been brought to justice.

If true, Rusdi's claims are another blow to efforts to restore the credibility of the AGO, which in the past served the interests of the regime.

Hopes were high when Abdul Rahman was appointed as attorney general two years ago that he would lead

his 7,000-strong force to instigate change. As a former lawyer with a legal aid institute, many had absolute faith in Abdul Rahman's integrity and sense of justice.

It is hoped that Rusdi's suspension will kick start a formal probe into allegations that he arranged a lenient sentence demand for drug suspect Hariono, as well as into other practices by state prosecutors that have been brushed under the carpet.

Poor law enforcement not only takes away opportunities for justice to prevail, but undermines the country's recovery program as a whole. Inconsistent law enforcement has scared away investors, resulting in job losses. Too much is at stake if law enforcers fail to come clean.