



Indonesia threatens Australia over Papuan refugees

Elizabeth Krantz 24 April 2006

Indonesia's belligerence towards Australia was again on display when 43 West Papuan refugees in a dugout canoe washed up on Cape York last January and demanded asylum, claiming they were fleeing a brutal, repressive regime in their home country. Australian immigration officials assessed that they faced real danger if returned to Indonesia, and granted them temporary protection visas.

The Indonesian government immediately demanded the refugees be returned to Indonesia. Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono personally demanded of Prime Minister Howard the return of the refugees. Howard initially stood up to the Indonesian bullying, refusing to interfere in the immigration process.

Indonesia stepped up the threats. Indonesia's Ambassador to Australia was recalled. Five Indonesian warships were despatched to patrol the waters to prevent further refugees escaping.

Indonesian newspaper Rakyat Merdeka ran a highly insulting cartoon on its front page depicting a dingo with John Howard's face shagging a dingo with the likeness of Foreign Minister Alexander Downer.

The row hit the business world when the Indonesian government banned the import of Australian cattle breeding stock and an Indonesian trade group called for the boycott of Australian goods. Indonesian Importers Association chairman Amiruddin Saud said the boycott of Australian goods would begin immediately and continue until the Papuans' visas were withdrawn.

There was no mention of a boycott on the millions of dollars of Australian foreign aid given to Indonesia each year, including the one billion dollars promised to assist with rebuilding of Aceh following the tsunami disaster.

Howard buckled under the pressure. In a craven act of appeasement, he quickly changed immigration procedures to force all asylum seekers entering Australia by boat to be sent to offshore islands so as not to be subject to normal immigration procedures.

On March 26, Prime Minister John Howard stated: "We do not support for a moment the West Papuan independence claim. To those who are urging us to do so, I say we will not."



Don't insult us, don't toy with us and don't deny us justice - Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono laying down the law to Australia.



The scurrilous cartoon that appeared in the Indonesian newspaper Rakyat Merdeka and triggered a response from Bill Leak (below).



Bill Leak responds in *The Australian* to the Indonesian cartoon. A very apt cartoon.



On 27 March hundreds of chanting demonstrators carrying placards with messages such as "Australia go to Hell" converged on the Australian embassy in Jakarta. About a dozen demonstrators painted slogans on the walls, such as "Leave Indonesia now" and "Australia fuck".

John Howard for once has misread the mood of the electorate. His kowtowing to the Javanese bullies has gone down badly with the majority of Australians.

"Don't insult us, don't toy with us and don't deny us justice"

These threatening words were uttered by Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on 17 April to an Indonesian forum. Howard's gutless appeasement had only emboldened the Indonesian bullies.

John Howard should be utterly ashamed. He is prepared to leave the people of West Papua to their fate at the hands of the brutal Indonesian military and rampaging militias just to appease the dictatorial Indonesian government. Howard is taking the wrong line in supporting Indonesia at all costs. **This cowardly action abandons one and half million indigenous Papuans to a regime of repression, rape torture and poverty and, according to Papuan leaders, genocide.**