

PAPUAN ANGER FOCUSES ON WORLD'S RICHEST MINE

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TRIBAL TRIBULATION: Papuan anger focuses on world's richest mine **By John McBeth**

JAKARTA - The pretext may have been demands for the closure of Freeport Indonesia's Grasberg copper and gold mine, 500 kilometers away across Papua's rugged central highlands. But while focusing on the world's most profitable mine attracted international attention, the true motivation for last week's bloody demonstrations in Papua's provincial capital, Jayapura, ran much deeper.

The student-led protests, in which four policemen, an air force officer and a protester were beaten and stoned to death, underline once again the need for the Indonesian government to do a lot more to address the remote territory's grievances, which range from an unfair distribution of the wealth gleaned from its natural resources to political double-dealing in Jakarta and a deep-rooted disrespect for Papuan culture.

Analysts say the demonstrations last Thursday had been planned for months by two radical groups allegedly linked to the territory's fizzling independence movement. Those plans appear to have pre-dated last month's unrelated blockade of the Grasberg mine itself, where police clashed with several hundred illegal miners panning for gold in the mine tailings, or waste rock, just below Freeport's mill.

As it was, the trouble with the miners, which dates back several years, served as the pretext for a March 14 attack on the four-star Sheraton Hotel near the lowlands town of Timika. That attack has been blamed on members of the Association of Mountain Papua Students (AMPS), an offshoot of the newly formed Front Pepera Papua Barat and one of the two activist groups believed to be behind the violence in Jayapura two days later. The groups are relatively new, and little is known about them apart from their links with the independence movement.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has made it clear he has no intention of bowing to protesters and closing the Grasberg mine, which last year earned the central government US\$1.1 billion in taxes and royalties. Hit hard by the \$5 billion Bre-X gold scam in 1997 and by a controversial ongoing pollution case against the US mining company Newmont, Indonesia's mining industry is already in the doldrums and struggling to attract new investment.

Yudhoyono also pointedly warned Jakarta's political elite against becoming embroiled in the Papua situation, a reference to opposition figures and other critics who have been seeking to turn public opinion against Freeport and US oil company ExxonMobil. Only last week, Exxon was given the go-ahead to act as the operator of Java's new Cepu oilfield after a prolonged dispute with the state-run Pertamina oil company, in which Yudhoyono personally intervened.

Never far from the surface, and often used as a potent weapon by Jakarta power-holders to pressure the government for personal gain, Indonesian nationalism in recent years has become increasingly linked to US actions around the world, particularly those perceived to be an attack on Islam. Recent protests by Islamic activists included both Freeport and Exxon in a long shopping list of complaints.

Political manipulation may also be at play. Defense Minister Sudarsono said this week that there seemed to be "integrated coordination" connecting separate demonstrations in the past few days at Cepu and the burning this Sunday of a Newmont Mining Corp exploration camp, 60km from the company's copper and gold mine on the island of Sumbawa. It was not clear whether he was referring to actions of opposition politicians or radical environmentalists.

In Papua, however, a different form of nationalism is ascendant, born out of the region's incorporation into the Indonesian republic in a controversial United Nations-sanctioned vote of "free choice" in 1969. Jakarta's inept handling of its easternmost province and a barely disguised disdain for the Papuans, who ethnically are distinct from the ruling Javanese, have only exacerbated a problem that now seems to have attracted a new and perhaps more radical generation of activists whose ultimate objective appears to be Papua's independence.

Front Pepera, one of the new radical groups, is reputedly led by Hans Gebze, an Australian-educated member of the dominant Dani highland tribe who has strong links with Australian leftist groups. Crisis Group International (CGI) analyst Francesa Lawe-Davies said it is difficult to determine what the organization stands for, but noted: "We haven't seen this level of coordination for several years."

The latest disturbances come after a year in which Freeport contributed five times as much to central government coffers as ever before. Since 1992, royalties and taxes have averaged an annual \$180 million, with the company adding more to the economy in the form of salaries, local procurements for food and other supplies, and community-development and local-government programs.

The problem, of course, lies in how much actually goes to Papua - an issue that rests solely with the central government. Of this year's \$1.1 billion, Papua is guaranteed 80% of the royalties, or a paltry \$65 million. Even then, instead of being sent directly to Jayapura, the money must first go to the notoriously tight-fisted Finance Ministry in Jakarta before it is redistributed.

Last-minute changes to the 2001 Special Autonomy Law by Jakarta's House of Representatives denied Papua a share of corporate taxes, by far the largest chunk of the annual payments. But as compensation, it is supposed to receive an additional 2% of the total grant Jakarta hands out to regional governments each year. That, according to a recent World Bank review, amounted to about Rp1.8 trillion (\$200 million) in 2005 - to go along with the more than Rp3 trillion it gets as a normal allocation.

Papuan leaders complain about the slow disbursement of funds, but Jakarta has a complaint of its own. Local police and prosecutors, working under the supervision of the Anti-Corruption Commission (KPK), are currently investigating widespread corruption in the governor's office and several of the province's 19 regencies. Jakarta is also scratching its head about the whereabouts of \$4 million it recently provided in electoral support funds to Papuan officials. As in Aceh, Indonesia's other special autonomy region, Papua has not always been well served by its own elite. Up the coast from Freeport, BP is developing the 24-trillion-cubic-foot Tangguh gas field, which will eventually provide the major source of income for the newly created Indonesian province of West Irian Jaya. Although revenues will only begin to flow after a four-

year cost-recovery period, the company is expected to contribute as much as \$200 million a year to the province when Tangguh reaches full production capacity in 2016.

Under a complicated formula that also applies to Aceh, 70% of post-tax revenue will be divided up between the provincial administration in Sorong (40%), the three districts affected by the project (30%) and the central government (30%). Now, \$200 million would appear to be far more than the threadbare West Irian Jaya administration could absorb without slippage.

If finances are a problem, the political situation in Papua is a minefield of Jakarta's own making. While the rebel Free Papua Movement's (OPM) stuttering bow-and-arrow insurgency hardly poses a serious challenge to Indonesian security forces, the threat of spreading civic unrest could well be real if the government continues to treat the Papuans as less than equals.

The latest recipe for rancor has been the March 10 local elections, which in effect cemented in place West Irian Jaya as a separate province and ignored the entreaties of moderate Papuan leaders to give the idea more time. The passage of a 1999 bill dividing Papua into three provinces—Papua, Central Irian Jaya and West Irian Jaya—has long been a catalyst for discontent, particularly among the elite in Jayapura who stand to lose the most.

In 2001, president Abdurrahman Wahid's administration enacted the Special Autonomy Law, which states that any territorial division has to be approved by a 42-member Papuan People's Council (MRP). But avowed pluralist Wahid was subsequently replaced by avowed nationalist Megawati Sukarnoputri, who proceeded to issue a presidential decree in early 2003 creating West Irian Jaya - covering all of Papua's so-called Bird's Head region.

Legal experts say the special-autonomy legislation trumps the 1999 bill, but it has one glaring loophole: there is nothing that specifically says it supersedes previous laws. Former ambassador Sabam Siagian, a member of the Papua Forum, is also critical of the fact that Megawati's home affairs minister, retired army general Hary Subarno, appears to have deliberately delayed the formation of the people's council.

Indonesia's Constitutional Court last year gave the green light to the creation of West Irian Jaya, but the whole episode and the decision to go ahead with the elections is seen as another case of Jakarta riding roughshod over Papua's newly won autonomous status. "What's so damaging is that they have been ignored," Siagian said. "The deeper problem is that Jakarta doesn't have the attention span to deal with Papua."

Under the best of circumstances, covering events in Papua in any objective way is difficult - even on the ground. But the government and its myriad opposition groups don't make it any easier, first by denying access to foreign journalists and applying a selective process to other dispassionate observers, and also by leveling an unending stream of human-rights-violation allegations at Indonesian security forces that have not been independently verified.

Take the case of 43 Papuans who sailed in January from the coastal town of Merauke to Australia's Cape York Peninsula in an outrigger canoe and are now seeking political asylum. Leaving aside the veracity of their claims of torture and repression by Indonesian soldiers, the episode illustrates the problem of trying to get a clear picture of what is going on in Indonesia's largest and least-populated territory.

Papuan and Western human-rights groups claim the Indonesian military is still engaged in genocide on a scale previously seen in East Timor, but Jakarta-based Western diplomats say they have seen nothing to support those allegations. Many Australians betray a bias by referring to the territory as West Papua, the same name used by the independence movement. Although

the province was called Irian Jaya during president Suharto's rule, it was subsequently changed by Wahid's administration to Papua – not West Papua.

East Timor has clearly left an indelible mark on the Australian psyche. While that is understandable given its life-saving role after the bloody events of 1999 and Indonesia's refusal to punish those responsible for the violence, there is a sense in Indonesia that certain Australian human-rights groups are now rubbing their hands and thinking they can help to accomplish independence for Papua as well.

This month the Australian ambassador to the United States, former spy chief Dennis Richardson, asked that same question in a speech criticizing the motives of those fighting for Papua's independence. "Perhaps those critics cling to an Indonesia which no longer exists, and for them to accept the Indonesia of today and to reinforce the positive developments in Indonesia is to deprive them of their *raison d'être*," he said.

In a country such as Indonesia whose intelligence services often prefer to deal more in conspiracy theories than fact, it feeds into the long-held belief that Australia is out to dismember its northern neighbor. That may seem implausible, but for diehard nationalists - particularly in the military and the House of Representatives - it is no laughing matter and frequently arises in public statements.

The government, on the other hand, has failed to provide any genuine reassurances that it has improved its treatment of the Papuans – yet another example of Indonesia's lack of attention to public relations and to international opinion. Critics say closing the province off to Western journalists and independent human-rights monitors, as has been the case for the past three years, inevitably leaves the impression that Jakarta has something to hide.

Minister Sudarsono, a political scientist who has been trying to reform the military, makes it clear that the government's closed-door policy won't change any time soon. What makes the government nervous, he explained recently, is that foreign reporters will act as a magnet for disaffected Papuan groups and only worsen an already difficult, though hardly crisis, situation.

The Indonesian military has an unenviable reputation to live down, but its more recent behavior in Aceh shows it may be making important progress on the human-rights front. Western diplomats say the last verified case of serious rights abuse in Papua occurred two years ago, in response to a separatist raid on an armory in the central-highlands town of Wamena.

Observers also note that during the latest disturbances in Jayapura and Timika, the paramilitary Police Mobile Brigade, a notoriously trigger-happy force that goes by the unfortunate acronym of "Brimob", appears to have acted with considerable restraint. Although four members of the security forces died and another 19 were wounded in the Jayapura incident, there is no evidence so far that they killed any protesters.

Thousands of students, however, have taken to the hills fearing reprisals in the wake of the recent violence. Witnesses say that the police also appear to have made tactical mistakes in dealing with the protesters.

Sudarsono acknowledged there have been past incidents of brutality and rape by government troops, but he said there is a tendency to insinuate that they were systemic and institutionally inspired. The same bias was obvious in the coverage of the August 2002 ambush that killed two American schoolteachers in the now-infamous Tamika ambush, with some Western newspapers alleging - without supporting evidence - that it had been planned by the top military leadership.

One of the biggest issues internationally is the government's military strength in Papua. Military analysts, relying on a variety of sources, now say there are 11,000 troops spread across the largely roadless territory -not 15,000 as has been widely reported. That is still substantially more than was originally thought, an indication the army may have beefed up under-strength battalions already in the province, particularly those stationed close to the Papua New Guinea border. There are currently more soldiers per citizen in Papua than anywhere else in Indonesia – though Papua is a massive territory to defend.

Human-rights groups, who use the high-end figure, claim reinforcements are continuing to be sent in. Jakarta, on the other hand, insists that they are deliberately misreading normal yearly rotations. Government officials privately admit that because most of the troops are based in and around towns, it leaves the impression the province is over-militarized.

The government's plan to base a third Army Strategic Reserve (Kostrad) division in Sorong, the old oil-mining town that serves as the West Irian Jaya provincial capital, won't be realized until 2014, a much longer term than originally thought. Even then, the division will be split between Sulawesi and Papua, with the apparent task of strengthening security across the entire eastern region. Both existing Kostrad divisions are based on Java.

All this conforms with recent moves, precipitated by the Ambalat territorial dispute with Malaysia over oil resources, to pay more attention to the country's territorial integrity. In Papua, for example, diplomatic sources say that the army is departing from its previous anti-guerrilla posture and putting greater emphasis on combined battalion-level operations that fit better with its newly defined role as an external defense force.

Like many countries in Southeast Asia, Indonesia has dealt poorly with its minorities. Papua is perhaps the most glaring example, a vast Melanesian territory whose people and culture are starkly different from those of the rest of the archipelago. The Javanese, in particular, who continue to have a dominant influence on Indonesian public life, have shown little patience for the Papuans, their aspirations or their culture.

It is this unhappy attitude that the Indonesian government has to overcome. Sudarsono, a Javanese himself, understands it well. He told foreign reporters recently that a lack of respect for Papua's unique culture ranks alongside economic injustice and unfair distribution of state income as one of the biggest problems confronting efforts to bring about genuine reconciliation.

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