

## IN BRIEF: POLITICAL

in provoking the violence,” Usman added, citing the prosecution of Bertu Coker in Ambon, Eurico Gutteres in East Timor, and the recent execution of the Poso three.

Critics have also questioned the timing of the verdict, noting that it was issued just two weeks before the visit of US President George W. Bush to Indonesia. Some commentators have also suggested that the case was rushed through in the first place over a concern with Indonesia-US relations.

“The case should never have been tried at a district court”, said Usman. “Wamang was found guilty of breaching human rights laws, and so he should have been tried at a human rights tribunal.”

The attack caused a further blow to US-Indonesia relations in 2002 after Washington demanded a full investigation into the killings, refusing to consider a resumption of the military ties which had been severed in the 1990s over Indonesian military actions in East Timor until the investigation was underway.

American Patsy Spier, who was wounded and widowed in the ambush, said in a statement that she was convinced the verdict was correct.

“I truthfully testified in the proceedings about the attack and how it has affected me,” Spier, who lobbied hard for authorities to investigate and prosecute what she called “a brutal and unprovoked assault,” wrote in a letter to the editor in *The Jakarta Post*. “I also believe that the sentence of life imprisonment for Antonius Wamang and the sentences for the other defendants are fully warranted and just,” she wrote in her letter.

### **Bakrie Bros downward spiral**

Another blow was dealt to the Bakrie Brothers conglomerate, which is controlled by the family of Coordinating Minister for People’s Welfare Aburizal Bakrie, following the cancellation of a controversial pipeline project that was to run from Kalimantan to Java.

The pipeline project is just the latest in a series of problems that have beset the conglomerate this year. The most notable set back has undoubtedly been the mudflow disaster in East Java and the subsequent failed merger between two other Bakrie subsidiaries due to fears that Lapindo Brantas, which is at the centre of the mudflow, would hurt any company that it is associated with.

Hot on the heels of these blows, comes the November 8 Ministerial announcement that the planned gas pipeline project from East Kalimantan to Java, which was won by Bakrie Bros in July this year, is now likely to be shelved.

Worth an estimated US\$1.26 billion, the pipeline project has been mired in controversy since the conglomerate first won the tender, with reports of irregularities in the tender process leading to an investigation by the Anti Monopoly Commission (KPPU).

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Minister for Energy and Natural Resources Purnomo Yusgiantoro made the announcement that the pipeline was now in doubt during a hearing at the DPD in response to a question from an East Kalimantan representative. He made the point that the project was an extremely expensive undertaking and that the most cost effective way of transporting gas from Kalimantan to Java was by tanker. He also added that the people of Kalimantan had demonstrated against the pipeline due to concerns that it would have a negative impact on the local economy.

This raises the questions of why the project was offered in the first place and whether the decision to shelve it is connected to the political fortunes of Bakrie Bros controlling shareholder, Mr. Aburizal Bakrie.

One Bakrie Bros director recently told the local newspaper *Kompas* that the company was confused over the government's decision because a comprehensive study had been undertaken by interested bidders prior to Bakrie Bros winning the contract. The study reportedly concluded that a pipeline less than 2,000 km is more economical than the use of tankers.

Political commentator Yosef Ardi suggests that there are a number of interests with high up political links who stand to lose if the construction of the pipeline goes ahead. Gas producers, exporters and buyers based in Kalimantan are all against the pipeline because they can get higher prices transporting the gas to China rather than to Java. There are also a number of business people with interests in the construction of gas terminals and tankers who stand to lose out if the pipeline goes ahead. One extremely influential Indonesian businessman, who recently secured a license to build a train line to transport gas around Kalimantan, is said to be a particularly vocal opponent of the pipeline project.

Despite the reported continuing support of the Bakrie project by fellow Golkar cadre Vice President Jusuf Kalla, it seems that Bakrie's star has lost enough of its shine through the Lapindo debacle to seriously compromise his political and, by extension, economic clout.

### **Marsillam factor draws ire of Kalla and others**

Vice President Jusuf Kalla's reaction to the establishment of President Yudhoyono's new policy oversight commission, referred to as UKP3R, or the Presidential Delivery Unit, is being played up in the media as another example of the ongoing rift between the two executive branch leaders. Media reports have stated that the vice president and other Cabinet members feel that the three-member team is unnecessary and that Kalla himself was never consulted over its establishment, which has caused him to speak out so viscerally against it.

Marsillam Simandjuntak, a bureaucrat who served as both a State Secretary and as Attorney General under former President Abdurrahman Wahid, is leading the three-member commission. His two deputies are Lt. Gen. (ret.) Agus Widjojo, former chief of the Indonesian Military's territorial affairs, and Edwin Gerungan, former chairman of the Indonesian Bank Restructuring Agency (IBRA).