

## IN BRIEF: POLITICAL

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This is not only because leakages from Bulog's stores onto the open market are fairly common but also because rice traders are a jittery bunch who will hold off from buying domestic rice if there is the possibility of buying lower priced imported rice. In other words, the imported rice does not have to physically make it onto the open market to ensure that the price of domestic rice falls. Indeed the rice price in traditional markets was widely reported to have dropped after the government's September announcement, well before any imports have actually occurred.

This suits the government because at the bottom of all these twists and turns is the government's basic dilemma: the trade-off between the interests of the rice consumers (low domestic prices) and the interests of the rice producers (high domestic prices). Given the size of the rural vote, it is inadvisable for the government to upset rice producers through direct moves to depress the price of domestic rice. DPR legislators agitating against the imports also have this rural vote in mind.

At the same time there is some potential for social instability if rice consumers find they can no longer afford a basic commodity to which such strong social ties are attached. And if the government were to buy 210,000 tons of rice domestically, the price of domestic rice would inevitably rise.

In an age where Bulog's control over the price of rice has been compromised by lifting its import monopoly and curtailing its operational funding, these annual announcements of the importation of rice may be one option for the government to balance these contending interests.

### **The weapons trail**

Another discovery of a weapons stash in Jakarta has sent shock-waves through the political establishment and has contributed to mounting evidence of TNI involvement in sectarian violence in Sulawesi, sources say.

Ten plastic bags containing 14 weapons and 6,978 rounds of ammunition were found by a scavenger next to a river bank on the Sedyatmo toll road connecting Soekarno-Hatta International Airport to north Jakarta on September 6.

The police have been investigating the find in close coordination with the military. The information released by the police so far indicates that the weapons were broken down into 113 component parts with the series numbers scratched off. They are thought to have been produced by manufacturers in the United States, Spain, Austria and Italy.

In the latest development, a retired army general told reporters on September 5 that all of the weapons found are usually used by the military in so-called special operations. He cited the discovery of limited edition sniper rifles, the Y2K No. L148293, eight silencers and special brass bullets as weapons used in special operations.

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A military source told the *Report* that such weapons and ammunitions are only used by special forces such as the police's Mobile Brigade paramilitary forces and the anti-terror unit, Detachment 88.

According to the source, hundreds of similarly mutilated weapons were trafficked into Maluku and Poso from East Timor in early 2000 where the TNI had used them throughout their 23-year occupation of East Timor. The East Timorese voted for independence at the end of 1999 and the sectarian conflicts in Poso and Ambon turned particularly bloody around 2000.

"Locals were trained to assemble the weapons," the source said, without naming the would-be trainers. "It would not surprise me if the sacks of weapons [found recently in Jakarta] were planned to be dispatched to several conflict-torn areas, such as Poso or Ambon or even Aceh aboard a plane from Soekarno-Hatta airport."

Meanwhile, two low explosive bombs have again rocked the Central Sulawesi town of Poso on Sept. 6 and Sept. 9, with each incident claiming one life. Also on Sept. 9, in Makassar, West Sulawesi, Detachment 88 raided a house and found a pile of explosive materials, including gun powder and dozens of home-made weapons. The owner of the house was arrested and an investigation is underway.

Many fear that the bomb blasts may provoke fresh violence, especially given the ongoing debate over the culpability of the Poso Three, three Christians accused of masterminding one phase of the sectarian conflict in 2001.

Several investigations into the issue have identified a number of groups which are believed to have played a leading role in the 2001 violence. One, known as *Tim Bunga* (Flower Team), is said to have senior and active intelligence officers as members. *Tim Bunga* is thought to have agitated radical Muslims in Poso by providing paramilitary training at several hideouts.

The sacking of Central Sulawesi Police chief Brig. Gen. Oegroseno early in September is believed to be connected with his belief in the role of *Tim Bunga* in the violence.

While the latest finding of another arms stash in Jakarta and the recent bombings in Sulawesi can still be treated as two separate cases, the evidence seems to be increasingly pointing to the involvement of rogue members of the TNI in that region's tragic violence. If Indonesia is to avoid another round of sectarian killings surrounding the sensitive case of the Poso Three, the government must act firmly and decisively to break the link between the terror attacks and the illegal trade of TNI arms.

### Drowning in garbage

Nobody who lives in Jakarta can fail to recognise the problems this city has in dealing with its garbage. The September 8 landslide that killed three people at Jakarta's biggest garbage dump has again highlighted the issue. This most recent incident is simply the latest in a long line of garbage-related stories