

INDONESIA

OPEN WOUND, Labour activist's murder haunts military

by John McBeth in Surabaya, Indo.
Source: Far Eastern Economic Review,
June 22, 1995.

Last year, lawyer Trimoelya Soeryadi asked two army colonels if they could arrange for him to meet their boss, East Java's regional commander. Trimoelya, defending one of eight people accused of murdering Marsinah, a 25-year-old labour activist, had publicly claimed she died in army custody. Now, he told the officers, he wanted to assure their general that he wasn't anti-military.

Days later, the officers told him they couldn't pass on his request. If they did, they said, they would be investigated for having contacts with the Surabaya-based lawyer. "Imagine it, two colonels, and they were too worried about their careers to do even that," Trimoelya marvels. "The bad thing about Indonesia is this all-pervasive fear -- fear to do this, fear to do that."

Police have now reopened the investigation into Marsinah's abduction and murder in May 1993. More than any other case, the brutal death of the lowly watch-factory worker has focused international attention on the plight of Indonesian labour, on the military's often heavy-handed intervention in strikes -- and on the methods that are routinely used to extract confessions. The case has its beginnings on May 3, 1993, when workers at Sidoarjo Catur Putra Surya watch factory went on strike, demanding payment of the minimum wage and dissolution of the local unit of the government-controlled labour union. The strike was settled the following day in talks between labour leaders, including Marsinah, the management and government and army representatives.

Although one of the conditions of the settlement was that the strikers would not be penalized, army officers summoned 13 male workers to the military district command on May 5 and forced them to sign letters stating they were "voluntarily" resigning from the company. Angry over the way the military had gone back on its word, Marsinah went to complain.

Trimoelya says newly-appointed regional commander Maj.-Gen. Imam Utomo has acknowledged that Marsinah was at the district headquarters until 9 p.m. on May 5. What happened to her after that remains a mystery. Three days later, her body was found lying on a roadside

200 kilometers from where she disappeared. A post mortem indicated she had died as a result of injuries inflicted during torture, including having a sharp object shoved into her vagina. Despite widespread coverage in the Indonesian press, the investigation languished for more than six months. Then on October 1, the factory's owner, Judi Susanto, seven civilian employees and Porong sub-district military chief Capt. Kusaeri were detained. Having been taken from their homes without arrest warrants, they were held incommunicado for 18 days at the 5th Division military headquarters in Surabaya.

The defendants later claimed in court testimony they were tortured into admitting their involvement in a murder conspiracy. Susanto says he was given electric shocks, burned with cigarette butts, ordered to mop the floor with his tongue and forced to eat his own vomit. On October 19-20, the defendants were moved to the provincial police headquarters and formally charged with killing Marsinah.

In subsequent trials, during which the defendants recanted their alleged confessions, Susanto was sentenced to 17 years imprisonment and the others to terms ranging from seven months to 13 years. The Supreme Court decision quashed the convictions. The military now says it will also exonerate the army captain, who has served a nine-month sentence for allegedly failing to report his knowledge of an impending crime.

"There are two aspects to this case, a cover-up and a frame-up," says Trimoelya, who also figured in the recent successful legal action against the government's closure of the newsweekly Tempo. "But where I think the military very wrong is that it tried to frame not one person, but nine people. Why involve many? In a conspiracy like this, you think the fewer people who know about it the better."

The state-appointed commission which has drawn high praise for the independence it has shown in some controversial cases, later declared the wrong people were on trial and the real culprits were still at large. It said there were indications that torture had been used to extract confessions. The report was largely ignored and the trial went ahead.

KOREA

Korea Approves Ordination Of Women

by Obk In Kim and Wbaja Hwang, National Organization of Korean Presbyterian Women
Source: Decade Link no. 16, March 1995

The 79th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) has voted to ordain women to the office of elder and pastor. The final tally showed 701 commissioners in favour of ordination and 612 against.

Now, the amendment must be approved by two-thirds of the 51 presbyteries in the PCK. To win approval in the presbytery, the amendment must be passed by a two-thirds majority. "We ask for your prayers as we work toward this goal and toward the date when women will be recognized as full partners in ministry in the denomination. The simple recording of a vote can't reflect the deep meaning this movement of God's spirit has for us. As we celebrate the Assembly's action, we acknowledge, with gratitude, the countless generations of Korean women who were and are builders of the church in their country. We give thanks for this "cloud of witnesses", for their courage and vision and faithfulness to the Gospel in the midst of tremendous struggle."

MALAYSIA

Malaysia For Domestic Violence Bill

Source: The Women's Tribune Watch, vol. 8, no. 2, 1994; appeared again in Decade Link No. 16, March 1995

The Malaysian parliament has moved one step closer to the passage of a domestic violence bill. While the Joint Action Group on Violence Against Women (JAG) welcomed the parliament's consideration of such a bill, they hope next year's version will include several key positions omitted in the current version. JAG believes any legislation should include the definition of domestic violence as a specific crime; provision of victim/survivor assistance; the separation of protection orders from criminal proceedings; inclusion of compulsory counselling for the abuser; and specific police procedures on the handling of domestic violence cases. JAG has actively lobbied for the enactment of the Domestic Violence Bill for eight years.