TEMPO, MARCH 24, 2008

THE LEGEND OF THE LOBBY QUEEN

Artalyta, a skilled businesswoman, adept at lobbying and huddling with high-ranked politicians, is being detained on suspicion of bribery.

OTTO CORNELIS KALIGIS was in a bad mood. At the Pondok Bambu Detention facility, on Monday last week, this lawyer representing Artalyta Suryani voiced his objection to the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). He was upset because his client was being detained there. This place, Kaligis said, can only hold 500 people, while the current population was over 1,500. Due to overcrowding, Artalyta was under a lot of stress, unable to sleep.

The 46-year-old woman is tucked away in a crowded cell, on suspicion of bribing prosecutor Urip Tri Gunawan with US$660,000. The prosecutor headed the team which investigated corruption of Bank Indonesia Liquidity Assistance (BLBI) funds received by Sjamsul Nursalim through Bank Dagang Nasional Indonesia (BDNI). Syamsul is a businessman whose businesses extend into various sectors, such as banking, automobile tires, and coffeehouses. Under the Dipasena company flag, the businessman born in Teluk Betung opened a shrimp farm in Lampung.

Sjamsul and Artalyta first met in teluk Betung, but they became closer after Sjamsul opened the largest shrimp farm in Southeast Asia. The businesses of both the Sjamsul and Artalyta families developed in Teluk Betung. However, the Artalyta family
was successful earlier on. While the Sjamsul family was still struggling, said on source close to Sjamsul, the Artalyta family business was already expanding. Susilo, Artalyta’s father, was already a well-known businessman. All of his businesses were conducted under the auspices of PT Aman Jaya. Because they were already wealthy, this family was the first to make acquaintances with high-ranking politicians.

Although she came from a wealthy family, Artalyta did not go to university. After graduating from the Palapa 3 High School in Tanjung Karang, she married Akiong, a contractor well-known for his company, CV Sonokeling. It was Akiong who Supported Sjamsul when the Dipasena shrimp farm was opened. At that time, said the source, the land for the shrimp farm could not yet be prepared because Sjamsul did not have enough money. Akiong then advanced the funds to clear the land, including the money needed to pay workers. “Yes, it was a sort of pre-financing,” said a member of the Sjamsul Family.

Later, when Sjamsul overtook her and skyrocketed as one of the nation’s top businessmen, Akiong was appointed as a senior company official at Gajah Tunggal, one of Sjamsul’s companies. It was while working at this company that Akiong started using his new name: Suryadharma. In 1998, Suryadharma died in Singapore from a liver problem. After her husband’s death, Artalyta revived the family business interests expanded into real estate, nighttime entertainment and getaways.

HER businesses and connections grew. Artalyta started socializing in wider circles. She is known to be close to a number of high-ranking politicians in Lampung. Alzier Dianis Thabranie, a Golkar Stalwart in Lampung, for instance, is close to her. Her network also extends far into the capital city, even to the top levels of the government.
Just remember her son’s wedding party, which was held in the Pekan Raya Jakarta complex in April 2007, which was attended by almost all of the country’s top officials. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono attended, along with First Lady Ani Yudhoyono. They posed for photos together with the newlyweds and their families. “The President was there for about 10 minutes,” said a Tempo source who attended the entire reception.

Some state ministers and senior government officials were also there. Agung Laksono, Speaker of the House of Representatives (DPR), delivered some welcoming words on behalf of the host. “Pak Agung spoke for about five minutes,” said Tempo’s source. Unfortunately, agung could not be reached for confirmation. His cellphone was being held by his aide. According to aide, this head of the legislative body was out of the country.

Former state officials also seen at the party included, among others, former President Abdurrahman Wahid and former Golkar Party Chairman Akbar Tandjung. A number of top businesspeople were also in attendances.

Some senior government officials were also seen at the wedding party of her oldest daughter, Imelda Dharma, in Surabaya, last June 2007. Imelda married Eiffel Tedja, the son of Alexander Tedja, a famous businessman in that city.

In addition to a number of ministers, local government officials also attended the function. From Jakarta, former Jakarta Governor Sutiyoso and National Police Chief, General Sutanto, and his wife were also present. Sutanto posed for a photo together with the parents of both families. Murdaya Poh and his wife, Hartati Murdaya, a business couple also known to be close to high-ranking politicians, were included in the photo.
The photo was widely distributed at the offices of the legislature in Senayan, two weeks ago. Everyone looked happy. Artalyta wore a white blouse, her hair draped over her right shoulder.

Like in her business dealings, Atalyta created this political lobby from the bottom up. She met with senior politicians in Jakarta through local politicians in Lampung. Akbar Tandjung, who attended her daughter’s wedding reception in Kemayoran, said that he was invited by the host. “As I remember, Artalyta brought the invitation together with a Golkar member from Lampung,” said Akbar. The former Golkar Party Chairman said that he was not very close with Artalyta, but knew that Lampung Golkar member very well.

This bottom-up approach, said the Tempo source, was used to get close to all high-ranking party officials. This method was also effective in establishing a lobby with prosecutors in the Attorney General’s Office (AGO). Prosecutor Urip, for instance, had known her for five years. Recently she also made the acquaintance of Kemas Yahya, Urip’s superior, and other high-ranking AGO officials. Because she was close with a number of top AGO officials, she had easy access to the Attorney General himself.

Take a look at what happened on January 17, 2008. On that day the AGO was supposed to question Sjamsul Nursalim. According to the schedule, this owner of Gajah Tunggal was to be questioned regarding the BLBI case that morning. About 50 reporters crammed into the yard of the AGO building, were the questioning was to take place. Outside the gate, 100 university students protested, shouting demands that Sjamsul be put in jail. However, up until evening, the business magnate who resides in Singapore had not appeared. The tires demonstrators finally went home.
Not long afterwards, a Toyota Alphard pulled up to the front gate of the building. Artalyta got out of the car, together with a bodyguard. She went inside, but it is not clear whom she met. However, a number of sources said that at that time she met with a senior AGO official.

Attorney General Hendarman Supandji was not unaware of Artalyta’s doings. Hendarman had even heard that his subordinate was being “approached.” That is why he cautioned Kemas Yahya. “I said to Kemas, be careful.” That reminder, said Hendarman, was made long before the arrest.

Despite the warning, some prosecutors still took risks. Several months later, five prosecutors even dared to vacation at her Lelangga Kecil Island in Lampung. Kemas Yahya was one of the prosecutors reported vacationing there.

It is indeed a beautiful island. Coral grows in its clear waters. The island covers 3 hectares. There is a villa, bungalows and a private dock at the heavily guarded island. When Tempo went there two weeks ago, a number of guards intercepted.

Kemas Yahya admits to knowing Artalyta. “As far as knowing her, I know her,” he said. But he says he forgets when he first made her acquaintance. Regarding the trip to Lelangga, Kemas made a strong denial. “I have never been there.” He also emphasized that his relationship with Artalyta had nothing to do with Sjamsul Nursalim’s BLBI case.

TALES of the effectiveness of Artalyta’s lobbying have long been the topic of conversation in Sjamsul Nursalim’s extended family. Some were amazed, others sneered. Those who are disgusted accuse Artalyta of wanting to take advantage of Sjamsul.

However, one member of Sjamsul’s family who often used to underestimate Artalyta, recognized her greatness on seeing the large number of high-ranking officials
who attended that reception in Kemayoran, in April 2007. “She is not famous, but knows and is known by many people. That is truly amazing,” said the source.

Aside from recognizing the effectiveness of her lobby, this source confirmed that Sjamsul never asked her to take care of the BLBI case. However, the source continued, “If Artalyta wants to help, she is welcome to.”

After news of the bribery case broke, the Sjamsul family formed an internal team to investigate the case. On Monday two weeks ago, a week after Urip and Artalyta were detained by KPK investigators, the family team went to Sjamsul’s home in Hang Lekir, South Kakarta.

Everyone living there was interrogated. The maids, drivers, gardeners, and security guards were all asked about the chronology of events, as well as about Artalyta’s activities while she was at the home. After tracking down all of the leads, a source from the Sjamsul family was convinced that Artalyta was working on her town.

The money given to Urip, said the source, did not come from Sjamsul. “I suspected that money was also prefinancing, which was later reclaimed from Pak Sjamsul.” Is that true? It is difficult to determine the truth. However, it appears that Sjamsul will use this alibi to sever his chain of connection with Artalyta. “Go ahead and check if there is a flow of money from Sjamsul to Artalyta,” said a close relative of Sjamsul.

Artalyta has decided to keep quiet in the face of these charges. Speaking to reporters who crowded around her on Monday last week, she only said, succinctly: “We must base this care on the presumption of innocence.” Aside from this, she only asked reporters not to connect this case with anyone.
Tempo attempted to meet with Artalyta at the detention facility on Friday last week. However, the guard replied that this mother of three was in special custody under the guard of the Mobile Brigade (Brimob). The guard then informed the special guard on duty. A short while later, someone in a Brimob uniform, complete with pistol holstered at the hip, met with Tempo. He stressed, tersely, “Only close relatives may visit.”

Tempo also visited the Spanish-style home of Romy Dharma, Artalyta’s son, on Jalan Pakubuwono, South Jakarta. The front was decorated with alabaster and metal slabs. The security guard at the home gave the brief message that, “Pak Romy is not at home.”

Otto Cornelis Kaligis confirmed that Artalyta had known Urip Tri Gunawaan for five years. However, he strongly denied that the money given to Urip was a bribe. Kaligis affirmed: “That money was a loan for a gemstone business.”

That loan, according to him, had nothing to do with the case against Sjamsul Nursalim. Because it was a loan; Artalyta and Urip made a debt agreement. The KPK is convinced that the money was indeed a bribe. “We have very strong evidence,” said Antasari, the KPK Chairman.

Wenseslaus Manggut,
Sunudyantoro, Anton Septian, Rika Panda, Nurochman (Lampung)

TEMPO, APRIL 28, 2008

A BRIDE FOR A CAPITAL CITY
A member of the DPR, Al-Amin Nasution, was arrested by investigators from the KPK two weeks ago. He is suspected of accepting bribe money from Azirwan, Secretary of the Government of Bintan Regency, Riau province, who also happens to be Chief Commissioner of PT Bintan Inti Sukses. Both men were arrested together.

The money was allegedly given to facilitate the process of rezoning 8,300 hectares of protected forest in Bintan. This area is to be transformed into the regency’s capital city and a major business area. This massive project involves a consortium of Singapore tourism companies and a Jakarta businessperson. The total project is valued at Rp13 trillion.

From Bintan, Tempo reports that construction had already begun on part of the protected forest before the legislature gave its approval on April 9. A few multistory buildings have already been built there.

What are the details and the complications involving this project? Is it true that Al-Amin is the only “insider” on the project? A number of the Tempo sources said that two other DPR members attended the Ritz-Carlton meeting on the night that Al-Amin was arrested. Here is the complete story.

The cell is small and stuffy. It measures a mere 4*7 meters. Five sofas are crammed into the cell, located on the ground floor of Jakarta Police Headquarters. Atop each one is a cotton-filled mattress and a pillow. The cell has five occupants, all suspects of corruption cases.

One of them is currently in the public spotlight. He is Al-Amin Nasution, a member of the House of Representatives (DPR) from the United Development Party (PPP) faction. Al-Ami, who heads the PPP in Jambi, has been in this cell for two weeks.
He is one of the detainees who gets many visitors. On Friday last week, scores of guests patiently waited for Al-Amin to wake from his afternoon nap. The guests varied, from family members to party colleagues and personal friends from Jambi, where he comes from. “He was tired, he immediately went to sleep after the Friday congregational prayer,” one police officer told Tempo.

Close to 2pm, Amin woke up and then received his guests, including Tempo. His face appeared weary as he sat on the mattress covered by a flower-motif-sheet. At the time, he wore a striped, long-sleeved-blue shirt, blue denims, clutching a book written in Arabic in his right hand.

The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) arrested this 42-year-old legislator at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, a five-star hotel in the Mega Kuningan area of South Jakarta, early Wednesday morning, April 9. He is suspected of accepting a bribe from Azirwan, Secretary for the Bintan Regency, Riau Archipelago. A total of Rp4 million was confiscated from Al-Amin. Another Rp67 million was found in his car. Where did all this money come from? “Ask Al-Amin,” said Dorel Almir, Azirwan’s lawyer.

Azirwan was also carrying a lot of money. From his room in the Oakwood Hotel, close to the Ritz-Carlton, the amount of S$33,000 was confiscated.

Investigators suspect that this money was given to facilitate the process to rezone 8,300 hectares of protected forests in Bintan, which was in the process of being transformed into the regency’s capital city and an integrated business zone. This rezoning plan needed the approval of the DPR’s Forestry and Agriculture Commission, of which Al-Amin is a member.
This rezoning plan actually began in 2004. At that time, the Bintan government sought an area where they could build their administrative capital. This is because Tanjung pinang, the then capital of Bintan, was likely going to become the capital of Riau province.

Three prospective areas were proposed. However, they finally decided on Bandar Seri Bentan, because it is strategically located, has many tourism sites and is close to the industrial city of Batam. Business tycoons from neighboring Singapore have long had their sights set on this area.

Senior officials in Bintan moved quickly. In mid-2006, they went to Singapore. Speaking to 200 business tycoons there, Bintan Regent Ansar Ahmad gave a lengthy presentation on the plan to develop the region.

The tycoons were ecstatic. Plans to collaborate were quickly established. On September 22, 2006, the Regent of Bintan signed an Agreement with a tourism consortium from Singapore, which goes by the abbreviation SPH. This consortium plans to build the Seri Bentan airport and the integrated business and tourism area. The plan was projected to cover an area of 8,300 hectares. This massive project would cost about Rp13 trillion.

After months of ironing out the details, the zoning plan for the region was finalized in January last year. The Bintan Regional House of Representatives had given its approval. At that point, construction teams went into action. The ground was leveled and construction on some buildings got underway.

However there was still one major obstacle. Based on the Forestry Department’s Decree No. 955/1992, the area was still classified as a protected forest. It was possible to
rezone it, if it was authorized by the central government and approval by the DPR in Jakarta.

Because the business machine was already in motion, the rezoning had to be taken care of immediately. On January 18 last year, Bintan Regent Ansar Ahmad submitted a rezoning request to the Forestry Minister. In a letter, Ansar explained that they planned to turn the protected forest into an integrated business zone. The work on the project would be carried out by Bintan Inti Sukses, a company owned by the provincial government, in cooperation with a Singapore consortium.

Eleven days after the letter was sent, Ansar invited members of the DPR’s Forestry and Agriculture Commission to visit Bintan. Ansar intended to clarify the plan to rezone the protected forest. House members were invited and to listen to the Regent’s explanation.

A year later on January 15, Forestry Minister M.S. Kaban sent a letter to the Forestry and agriculture Commission head. Following up on the request of Regent Ansar, Kaban requested that the protected forest in question be rezoned. The Bintan government also formed a special team led by Azirwan.

The Forestry and Agriculture Commission formed their own special team to study the proposal. There were 10 people on the team, including Al-Amin. This project was then intensively reviewed by this special team and by Azirwan’s own team. A former team which had been involved in the past was also invited to Bintan, in February last year. Up to that point, everything seemed to be going smoothly.
However, three months before the DPR special team visited Bintan, the KPK received an unfavorable report regarding the rezoning plan. Suspicions of bribery in the case had emerged.

Investigators then examined the information. Things became clearer in early April, six days before DPR members gave their approval, on Tuesday two weeks ago. Reportedly, the Bintan Regional Secretary Azirwan was off to Jakarta to meet with a number of DPR members. Since he was put in charge of the team, he often traveled back and forth to Jakarta.

Investigators focused their attention on a number of the DPR’s special team, especially Al-Amin Nasution, who was known to communicate frequently with azirwan. On that Tuesday two weeks ago, their investigation intensified.

A Tempo source said that Al-Amin left Senayan at 9pm that day. He headed for the Sari Bundo Restaurant in Central Jakarta. There he met with Arya, his friend from Jambi. At the restaurant, Arya telephoned Eiffel, a woman who was recently arrested together with Al-Amin and Azirwan at the Ritz-Carlton. Together with Arya and Eiffel, Al-Amin then went to the Four Seasons Hotel in Kuningan, South Jakarta.

From there they moved to the Ritz-Carlton. Al-Amin entered the hotel at nearly midnight. Azirwan was already waiting in the lobby. The two of them could be seen having a serious discussion. They never knew that eight investigators from The KPK were watching them. After talking in the lobby for about half an hour, they went to the Mistere nightclub located on the first floor.

Before heading for the club, said the Tempo source, Al-Amin contacted two of his colleagues in the Forestry and Agriculture Commission. These two have the initials SS
and SH. The two were asked to come to the Ritz, and they in turn, headed for Mistere. Azirwan’s lawyer, Dorel Almir, verified that these two DPR members arrived there, but sat separately from Azirwan and Al-Amin. “Perhaps because they came together, they could not sit at one table,” said Dorel.

These two DPR members stayed only for short time. They said goodnight at about 11:30pm. Two hours later, investigators arrested Azirwan and Al-Amin. Regarding those two House members with the initials SS and SH, Dorel said succinctly:” I can not give any comment.” According to rumors, the two reminded was wearing, an emblem which indicated he was a DPR member.

Dorel also verified that that night Azirwan did indeed give money to Al-Amin. However, it was only Rp1.5 million. The lawyer said that this money was given at the beginning of their meeting, to pay for food and drinks. “Perhaps because of their relations, they usually took turns paying,” said Dorel.

Al-Amin was arrested, and Rp67 million was found in his car. This money was kept in several envelopes. Presumably, the plan was to distribute these envelopes to his colleagues at the DPR. The plan could not be carried out because he was arrested by investigators.

When he was met by the Tempo team, Al-Amin lodged many denials on the event he is proud of. The DPR observers also made a strong denial. The money in the car, he said, was to repair a bath room and fence at home. The envelope which contained Rp1.3 million was to be used to purchase building materials. The envelope containing Rp1.5 million was to pay the workers. There was also the matter of another envelope containing
Rp400,000. This was to pay a worker to cut down a mango tree in front of his house. “I gave all those envelopes to the investigators,” said Al-Amin.

Is it true? Investigators are still examining the case. “We are still investigating,” said Antasari Azhar, KPK Chairman. The KPK is also investigating the possibility that other House members may have also accepted the money.

The Financial Transaction Reports & Analysis Center (PPATK) promised it would check the bank account of House members from the Forestry and Agriculture Commission. The director of law at this institution, I Ketut Sudiarsa, said that his institution is used to working with the KPK. “Even if they had not acted, we would,” he said.

Forestry and Agriculture Commission Chairman Ishartanto strongly denied the money was to rezone that protected forest. The KPK, according to him, only approved the research results of an independent and integrated team formed by the Forestry Department. “If it turns out that the transaction is legally deficient, we will hold another meeting to discuss it,” he said.

Other members of the Forestry and Agriculture Commission joined the chorus of denials. Ganjar Pranowo from the Indonesian Democratic Party of struggle (PDI-P) emphasized that the rezoning process was done according to the law. So, “What need was there for a bribe?” he asked.

In addition to combing Jakarta, investigators also conducted a raid in far-off Tanjung Pinang. On Monday last week, Azirwan’s home was raided for five and a half hours. The documents seized there were kept in two travel bags. A large bag, a briefcase,
and a cardboard box were confiscated from Azirwan’s Nissan Terano. A laptop and some folders were taken from Azirwan’s office.

Yudha Inangsah, Assistant for Legal and Administrative Affairs for Bintan Regency, strongly denied the bribery charges.” Azirwan’s letter of assignment was only to observe the sessions at the Forestry and Agriculture Commission, not to give money to DPR members,” said Yudha.

Meanwhile, from behind bars, Al-Amin plans to file a pretrial motion against the KPK. However, the anticorruption body is not worried. They are ready to meet Al-Amin’s demand.

Wenseslaus Manggut, Shinta Puspasari (Jakarta),
Wahyu Dhyatmika (Bintan), Rumbadi Dalle (Batam),
and Jupernalis Samosir (Riau)

TEMPO, MAY 5, 2008

NAMRU UNDER SCRUTINY

The Namru Lab is being charged with activities outside its mandate to conduct research. For the past 10 years a number of cabinet ministers and senior government officials concerned with security have been calling for the closure of this US Navy-operated laboratory in Jakarta. Government officials are divided on the issue. Intelligence circle say some people close to the President are involved, in the interest of Washington.

*Drug: Azithromycin*
Sample group: 300 people
(225 soldiers, 75 civilians)
Location: Papua’s northeast region

The researchers divided the sample group into three sub-groups, based on the dosage of azithromycin. Drinking water was provided and sweet biscuits were offered. In order to test the potential of this antibiotic—generally used for light to medium cases of bacterial infections—in preventing malaria, blood samples were taken from the sample group.

That was one of the works conducted in 2003 by members of the US naval Medical Research Unit (Namru) 2, whose offices and laboratory are located in Central Jakarta. Eight personnel were dispatched to Papua, accompanied by six other researchers, including one from Maryland, USA, where the headquarters of this institution is located. Their research findings were published in a scientific journal that same year.

The Namru-2 laboratory is now under intense scrutiny. Aside from the fact that the agreement which regulates the activities of the laboratory is up for extension, some people are objecting to the fact that the American personnel working there hold diplomatic immunity. “Why a health laboratory should be run by the military?” asked Health Minister Siti Fadilah Supari. And a source in the Foreign Department confirmed that,” All their personnel came here using diplomatic passports.”

This immunity issue has caused quite a stir. The intelligence community maintains that the diplomatic status of Namru’s personnel makes it difficult for their ‘security activities’ to be touched, to be controlled. Moreover, they are free to travel
around Indonesia. According to a senior State Intelligence Agency (BIN) official, the Namru personnel are, after all, members of the military, who are trained in the field of intelligence. “They could very well conduct intelligence activities under the guise of research,” said the official.

Namru-2 has a lengthy history in Indonesia. It was established in 1970 based on an agreement signed be Health Minister G.A. Siwabessy and US Ambassador Francis Galbraith in Jakarta. This was a response to the request of the Indonesia government to Washington to help fight the rapid spread of malaria and measles.

Since it was established, the Namru lab has rife with rumors. For instance, according to reports, this office helped Indonesia’s New Order government ‘eliminate’ members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Rumors also circulated that Namru had produced biological weapons, or that they took blood samples from Indonesian soldiers. “Those are just tall tales from the opposition,” said Harry Purwanto, Director for North and Central American Affairs at the foreign Department.

This strange rumor was duly refuted. Cameron R. Humes, the current US Ambassador in Jakarta, gave assurances that Namru operates transparently. If they were conducting covert activities, he said, they would not be operating out of a place owned by the Health Department. The laboratory is inside the compound of the Department of health, which is located across the street from Salemba Prison. The Health Research and Development Agency under the Directorate General of the Eradication of Infectious agency (BPOM) can be found in the same area.

The Namru laboratory is not open to the public. On Friday last week, when Tempo was given a chance to enter the premises, a member of the security detail stood
guard out front. He inspected bags and asked that personal identification be traded for
guest passes. On the ground floor of the three-story building there were offices and a lab
where research on malaria-carrying mosquitoes was being done. A mosquito hatchery is
located there.

A staff member pointed out some cabinets with rows of plastic containers, filled
with water bearing mosquito larvae. Two bottles on the table were filled with
Toxorincaitis larvae, a type of mosquito which does not feed on blood, but lives off
honey. Breeding in a tank of water, these microorganisms eat the larvae of other
mosquitoes, including the Aedes aegypti species, which spreads dengue fever. “This is
the biological weapon,” said one staff member, laughing.

There’s only research, nothing else, said the staff member who accompanied
Tempo. According to an Indonesian staff member, Namru-2 consists of four programs,
namely research connected with infectious diseases which spreads as a result of a virus,
bacteria, parasites, or epidemics of unidentified diseases. There are three laboratories
here, plus one lab to keep test animals-generally monkeys.

The Namru research program, according to Health Minister Siti Fadilah, was
indeed very special when it was first founded, but it is no longer like that. “It is not as
good as the Eijkman Institution,” she said Eijkman is a molecular biology laboratory
under the auspices of the Research & Technology Minister and located at Cipto
Mangunkusumo General Hospital in Jakarta.

The United States seems very interested in holding on to the Namru-2 lab.
President George W. Bush even including this issue in a joint statement made with
President Yudhoyono, during his visit to Indonesia in November 2006. Ambassador
Humes said that their country’s military is often deployed in tropical regions, so they need to know about infectious tropical diseases. As such, the Namru-2 lab is still very much needed.

However, Jakarta’s position has changed over the past decade. Senior officials are now recommending that the lab be closed down. On November 9, 1998, Defense Minister concurrently Commander of the Armed Forces, General Wiranto, sent letters to the Foreign Affairs Department and the Health Minister, proposing that the government end its cooperation with the Namru-2 lab.

That was not the only time the government felt negatively about the lab. A year later, Foreign Minister Ali Alatas sent a letter to President B.J Habibie, maintaining that the political, scientific and technological benefits for Indonesia were decreasing. “In fact, the negative impact on matters of security was becoming increasingly visible,” Ali Alatas wrote in a letter dated October 19, 1999.

Alatas had a good reason for writing this. He connected Namru with the planned Verification Protocol for the Biological Weapons Convention, which at that time was being deliberated in Geneva, Switzerland. This convention required countries with biological facilities to declare themselves publicly. Then there was the investigation process, which included an area 500 square kilometers around the laboratory. Because the Namru lab lies in the middle of the city, he thought that the entire Jakarta area would be included in the area of investigation. However, the Namru lab remained in operation.

The new regime also refused to shut it down. Foreign Affairs Minister Alwi Shihab, during the Abdurrahman Wahid presidency, sent a letter to US Ambassador Robert Gelbard on January 28, 2000. In it, the government informed him that it intended
to stop Namru’s operations. However, it also noted that the Namru lab could continue to operate through a mutually beneficial agreement. Gelbard snatched at this opportunity on the very same day. “We are ready to negotiate,” he said.

Two months later, Alwi issued a diplomatic note, thus annulling his previous letter. He had decided that Indonesia was ready to negotiate a new agreement. The negotiations indicated that the 1970 agreement was still in effect. “During the negotiations, the government asked that Indonesian researchers be involved,” said Alwi, when asked for confirmation regarding this matter. “At that time, Minister Alwi continuously exerted pressure on lobbied President Wahid on behalf of American interests,” said a Tempo source.

Since then, a series of meetings were held between the Indonesian and American delegations: on May 5 and June 8, 2000, as well as on January 18 of the following. But everything came to the status of the laboratory’s personnel. The US asked that all Americans working at Namru be given diplomatic immunity, but Indonesia rejected the request. “Their reason was that they wanted protection for their citizens in times of crisis,” said Harry Purwanto, who now heads the Indonesian delegation.

Objections towards the laboratory continued to be heard. Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda, who replaced Alwi during President Megawati Sukarnoputri’s administration, also took a stance on the issue. He sent letters to the Coordinating Minister for Politics & Security, the Defense Minister and the Minister of Health. In the letter he mentioned that Namru had not reported any research findings since 2000.

The government was becoming increasingly upset at the laboratory’s lack of transparency. On August 25, 2004, Hassan wrote that the government had to handle the
problem of infectious diseases such as dengue fever and bird flu. A national disaster status had even been declared on the dengue fever problem. However, during such a critical time, Namru failed to conduct any research.

At the same time, the government noted a sharp increase in the level of activity at Namru. It was importing many more items for research, such as medicines, computers and laboratory equipment. A total of 134 deliveries via diplomatic mail were recorded for the laboratory. There were also a significant number of staff members being moved: 21 times. Hassan recommended that Namru be closed after the completion of nine ongoing projects.

A new government took office, and the Namru lab was still in operation. Two weeks after her appointment as Minister of Health, according to a source in the government, Siti Fadilah ordered the Namru lab to be shut down. But instead of getting results, she was suddenly summoned to the Palace by President Yudhoyono. “The big boss asked her to revoke her decision,” said the source. Minister Siti Fadilah deferred to the President’s order, who in that meeting was accompanied by special staff member Dino Patty Djalal.

President Yudhoyono asked that relations between the two countries be strengthened, including the cooperation with Namru. When he received US Secretary of Health Michael O. Leavitt on October 17, 2005, the President hoped the Namru lab could help in improving the capacity of Indonesian health workers in fighting infectious diseases, such as bird flu. This statement was reiterated when President Bush visited Bogor in November 2006.
At this point negotiations on Namru resumed. The government formed a delegation, led by the Foreign Affairs Department’s Director for North and Central American Affairs. Its members consisted of representatives from the Office of the Coordinating Minister for Politics & Security, Defense Department, Department of Health, Military HQ, State Intelligence Agency (BIN) and the Special Staff of the Office of the President. They met the American delegation, led by US Deputy Chief of Mission in Jakarta; John Heffern was accompanied by Namru officers and a legal advisor from the US Pacific Command in Hawaii.

Once again the negotiations stalled over the issue of diplomatic status for Namru personnel. Indonesia would only agree to give immunity to Namru’s director and deputy director, while the US side asked that all personnel be granted the same status without exception. According to Harry, there were four other major issues being contested, among them, indonesian’s request to include a clause on the Biological Weapons Convention Verification Protocols (see Never-Ending Negotiations).

A day after the deadlock in the negotiations, the Presidential Palace intervened. Dino Patti Djalal, a special staff of the President, sent letters to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defense and Health, the Armed Forces Commander and the head of State intelligence. He passed on the World Health Organization’s evaluation, which essentially said that they were satisfied with the collaboration with Namru.

In his letter, Dino wrote that Namru was beneficial for Indonesia. But he also pointed to the different viewpoint regarding Namru, such as the President’s view that Namru was an opportunity rather than a threat, which is the view of his detractors. “This view regards Namru as an agent of the CIA, a spreader of infectious diseases, and a
factory for biological weapons, requiring it always to be pressured and shunned,” Dino wrote.

Intelligence circles, according to the source, were offended by the letter. They accused Dino of playing up to American interests, which wanted to hold on to the Namru lab by various means. “During one negotiation, Dino pounded on the desk, always speaking in the name of the President, who still wanted Namru to continue,” said a Tempo source in the Foreign Affairs Department.

When asked to confirm the letter, Dino did not deny nor verify it. “I can not comment on state documents that have been leaked,” said the presidential spokesman, tersely. “Leaking state documents is a crime. One can be arrested for that.” Regarding charges that he is working for US interests, Dino briefly replied: “Nonsense.

WMU, Budi Setyarso, Wahyu Dhyatmika, YughiaE.,

Gabriel Yoga, Bunga M.