

84/96

AI INDEX: ASA 21/27/96

8 MAY 1996

INDONESIA: OPPOSITION POLITICIAN LATEST VICTIM OF REPRESSIVE LAWS

As politician Sri Bintang Pamungkas was sentenced today to two years and 10 months imprisonment for "insulting" the President, Amnesty International again calls on the Indonesian Government to repeal legislation allowing for the imprisonment of peaceful government critics.

"The authorities have yet again demonstrated their intent of silencing peaceful opposition in the country -- the use of this repressive legislation has in the past year resulted in the imprisonment of journalists, activists and a psychic," Amnesty International said today.

Indonesian laws, including the so-called Hate-Sowing Articles, allow for the imprisonment of individuals for expressing "hatred" and "insulting" the government or the head of state. Sri Bintang Pamungkas is the sixth person to be sentenced to imprisonment under these repressive laws since 1995.

A former member of Indonesia's Parliament for the United Development Party (PPP), Sri Bintang Pamungkas, was found guilty of "insulting" President Suharto by allegedly referring to him as a "dictator" during a seminar at a German University on 9 April 1995. He has denied the allegation and has announced that he will appeal the decision. He has so far not been imprisoned.

Sri Bintang Pamungkas was originally questioned over his alleged role in demonstrations in Germany in April 1995, during a visit by Indonesian President Suharto. However, attention turned to alleged comments by Sri Bintang Pamungkas in the seminar after it became clear that the police could not find any evidence of his involvement in the demonstrations. He was ultimately charged with "insulting" the President, under Article 134 of the Criminal Code, and his trial began in November 1995.

Like other political trials in Indonesia this trial has been marked by unfairness. Defence witnesses travelling from Germany received their first summons one week after they were required to appear in court. The one witness who was able to travel to Indonesia was hampered in his efforts to obtain a visa from the Indonesian Embassy in Germany. On arrival in Indonesia, he was subjected to extensive surveillance by the authorities.

As one of the few outspoken members of parliament, Sri Bintang Pamungkas has come under increasing restrictions by the authorities. In April 1995, he was banned from travelling overseas. The following month, he was expelled from the parliament. A further one year travel ban has been recently imposed. During his trial, demonstrations were held outside the offices of his lawyers and the court, apparently with the connivance of the authorities.

Domestic and international organizations have condemned the treatment of Sri Bintang Pamungkas. In April 1996, the Inter-Parliamentary Union stated that the allegations against him related merely to his right to freedom of expression.

ENDS\