

## **The rejection of MSM in North Sulawesi has become a matter of patriotism – a report of the final convulsions of the poisonous dragon**

As it became clearer and clearer that the central government fully supports the provincial government's refusal to permit the Australian mining company Meares Soputan Mining to operate a gold mine in North Sulawesi's Toka Tindung area, the company chose to shock the public with an outrageous lie. In the region's daily Manado Post, editions of July 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, it was stated in big block letters and everyone could read it: the Indonesian president had instructed for immediate commencement of MSM gold production.

That news which turned out days after to be a public lie, was good enough to heat the moods of every good North Sulawesi citizen. Would the central government really fall back into former dictator Suharto times and overrule the province's authority? Would the president dare to violate the new laws of regional autonomy in favor of little private Australian company Archipelago Resources Plc? In order to make sure not, threats towards the central government were uttered, thrown in by well known public Minahasa politicians. During those days of uncertainty all of a sudden the case grew into a matter of Minahasa unity, the provincial governor being their new leader. The rejection grew into a cause of new Minahasa identity to defend the territory. Thus the ones responsible for the newspaper scandal that filled the regional tabloids over a week in the end had to recognize that their strategy of offense had resulted in the opposite of what they had hoped for: a renewed and even stronger resistance against the mine.

According to the Dow Jones Wire, June 6<sup>th</sup> edition, and several Indonesian national news media, the Indonesian Minister For Environment stated that his ministry won't issue a license to Meares Soputan Mining as it was unable to convince the provincial government and local people, thus failed to meet the EIA conditions. Earlier the minister of Fishery and Ocean had already stated his support for the North Sulawesi governor to reject the mining project (Media Indonesia online). And on June 18<sup>th</sup> the Minister for Social Affairs had also stated his rejection of MSM, as cited in local daily "Komentar". In this light the concerted newspaper news of July 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> in favor of the goldmine soon to commence operation under presidential decree must be interpreted as another desperate effort of the company to prevent the international shareholders and credit giving banks from noticing that the final out verdict for MSM had already been spoken. Only, indeed there is no *official* letter of the Minister For Environment as it obviously fears to give the company ammunition to start an international arbitration. Thus the strategy seems to be "make them wait until they lose the trust of the financiers".

The company itself announced in the July 17<sup>th</sup> 2007 edition of AFX Uk focus news 15:45 that it was confident to gain the EIA from the Ministry For Environment by the end of August. For that purpose it consolidated once again their (money minded) army consisting of corrupt scientists of the provincial University like Yany Kusen and even the

University's rector Lucky Sondakh of the Sondakh dynasty which had recruited the former provincial governor Adolf Sondak (alm.) to give the original starting help for MSM in 2005. The hastily organized university seminar on "Mining and Public Welfare and Health" which was meant to produce a scientific recommendation for MSM (and thus financed by Newmont as well as MSM and other mining companies) turned out to be another backlash for the company. Before it had even been organized, the public outcry in the local media was impressive. No wonder then that a sentence uttered during the seminar by the representative Deputy general of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (ESDM) which is known as the strongest promoter of MSM quickly was politicized and turned into a scandal of first rank. The man had involved goats in a comparison in order to plea for a renewed discussion between the provincial government and the company to find a solution. The next day, August 7<sup>th</sup>, the local media unisono condemned the man of having insulted the people of North Sulawesi as goats. The so created "goat gate" still keeps the media busy until now, the case was taken up through all ranks of political parties and government institutions from the governor down to the village headmen, from the provincial parliament to the regional house of representatives in Jakarta and there was even a special parliament commission formed which will present the case to the president. Even if it seems ridiculous to the observer, this case shows again that North Sulawesi stands now united against Meares Soputan Mining: No gold mine in Toka Tindung! Or as written in a comment of the largest regional newspaper Manado Post, August 8<sup>th</sup> edition, page 13: "...good bye PT. MSM dari bumi Nyiur Melambai." (good bye MSM from coconut country North Sulawesi). What was first a rejection for technical reasons has become a question of cultural identity and psychology: "Let's defend Minahasa against the Australian intruder".

In this respect the renewed and third departure of a small MSM "army" to Jakarta on Thursday, August 9<sup>th</sup>, recruited from paid village chiefs and local priests to promote the company's interests in the capital is seen as a question of betray. The actors will be treated as traitors by the larger North Sulawesi community.

Freundeskreis Lembah – Pulisan – Bangka, August 10<sup>th</sup> 2007.

Reference:

Local and national newspaper articles (archived, can be provided in Indonesian language).

Manado Post and Komentar editions, July 6<sup>th</sup> to July 10<sup>th</sup> 2007

Manado Post and Komentar editions, August 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> 2007

Media Indonesia Online, July 4<sup>th</sup> 2007

Berita Sulut June 10<sup>th</sup> 2007

Matrix, July 4<sup>th</sup> 2007

SINDO News July 5<sup>th</sup> 2007

Sinar Harapan July 12<sup>th</sup> 2007