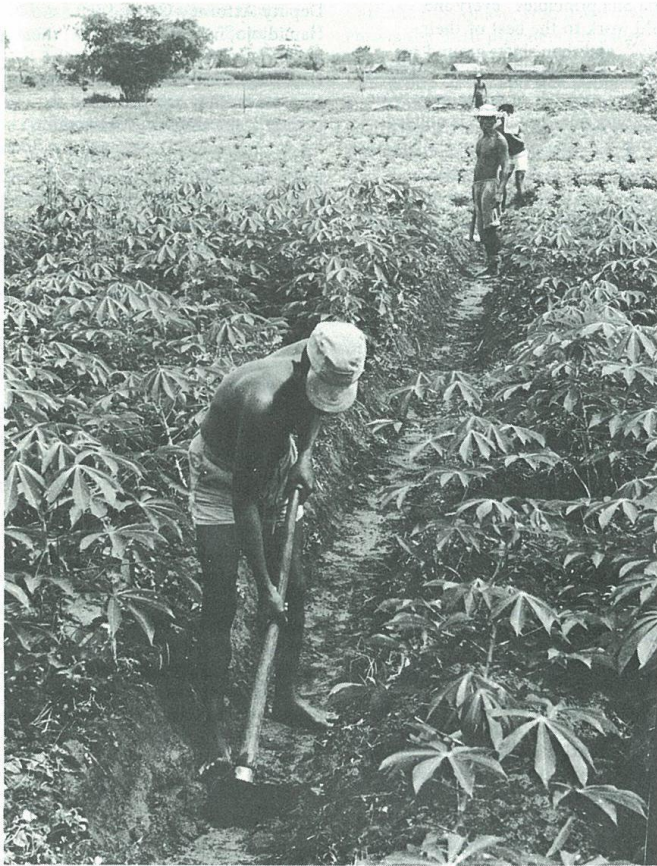


the island of buru

In July 1969, the Indonesian Government announced the establishment of a permanent 're-settlement' project on Buru island for untried political prisoners. By then, the first batch of 2,500 prisoners had been transported there in conditions of utmost secrecy from prisons throughout Java.



Prisoners grow their own food. Cassave fields in Unit IV, Buru.

The island of Buru is part of Maluku, one of Indonesia's most easterly groups of islands. Until 1969, when it became the site of the first long-term detention camp for political prisoners, it was a little-known island, not unduly small but with a population of only about 40,000. It had long been under consideration as a site for transmigration projects to relieve the population congestion in Java.

Agricultural production is still essentially primitive. The island has no roads linking the tiny capital, Namlea, to other townlets and villages; the only form of transportation is by river. The island is covered by dense jungle; regular communications with the rest of the

country are non-existent, the only link being an occasional sea transport service between Namlea and Ambon, the capital of Maluku, several hundred miles to the East.

The creation of a detention camp in Buru added a new dimension of permanency to the problem of political detention in Indonesia. Instead of speeding up the trials and releasing those against whom no charges could be brought, the Government had embarked on a course of long-term compulsory 're-settlement' for many thousands of prisoners.

OTHER "BURUS" CONSIDERED

Since 1969, the prisoner population on Buru has risen to 10,000; by October

1972, sixty-five had died. Late in 1972, the Indonesian authorities announced that 're-settlement' sites for another 29,000 political prisoners were being sought; two islands have been mentioned in this connection: Nias and Siberut, both lying off the west coast of Sumatra.

The decision to establish the Buru project was taken by the Commander of the Command for the Restoration of Security and Order (**Kopkamtib**); the Attorney-General was then appointed to manage the project. Thus, the Army had delegated responsibility for those political prisoners it had decided not to release to the Attorney-General's office. This does not, however, mean that the political prisoners on Buru are in the hands of a civil authority. The Regional Military Command at Ambon is in charge of all security arrangements of the project and the guards and personnel are recruited from the Military Police Corps (CPM). Moreover, the Army is powerfully represented in **Bapreru** (Buru Resettlement Executive Authority), the Executive Chief of which is a senior Army Officer, Brigadier General Wadli Prawirasupradja.

"THORN FOR THE COMMUNITY"

What are the official motives for the project? The Attorney-General, Sugih Arto, (himself an Army general) stated in the Preface to a brochure issued by **Bapreru** in December 1969 that the transfer of category 'B' prisoners to Buru is intended 'not to isolate them from the public at large but merely to provide them with a

indonesian attitudes

"How long have they to stay there (in Buru)? They themselves are asking this question. Their families are asking this question and I myself join in asking it. And the answer is as dark as the sky above unit II on that December afternoon in one thousand nine hundred and seventy-one.... They are all lonely men. They are all lonely while labouring from morning to sunset. They are also troubled by the feeling of uncertainty about the future and about their loved ones far across the seas, parents, wives, children, relatives."

Indonesian journalist Marcel Beding in **Kompas** after his visit to Buru, December, 1971.