

has granted permission to several groups of journalists to visit the project and they have since written up their impressions in detail. An International Red Cross mission also visited the island early in 1971 and, although, according to normal Red Cross procedure, the mission's report has not been made public, the members of the mission took the unusual step of holding a press conference after their return to Jakarta from Buru at which they spoke of the project in terms of admiration and praise. Buru, they said, had reminded them more of a common agricultural society than a camp for prisoners. They found no traces of dejection or tenseness on the prisoners' cheerful faces.

But the impressions of the group of foreign and Indonesian journalists that visited Buru in December 1971 were strikingly different. The reports of the foreign journalists were so critical that they were not allowed to circulate in Indonesia; the *Newsweek* issue containing a report of the visit was allowed to circulate only after this report had been blacked out.

The journalists' reports show a deep concern for the physical conditions in which the prisoners were forced to live, but they were even more deeply concerned about the frustrations of the prisoners whom they had met. The Dutch journalist, Peter Schumacher, wrote "Buru is not what one would call a devil's island, at least, not the small part we were shown" (the group saw only four of the eighteen units in the camp) "but my general conclusion is that, despite the spiritual care, most of the prisoners are worried and some are simply desperate."

#### NO HOPE FOR THE OLD AND THE SICK

As is the case with political prisoners in all other places of detention in Indonesia, the prisoners in Buru are deprived of all news from the outside world; they may not read or write, but can correspond with close relatives once a month, though only a small percentage of letters actually get through.

Medical facilities for the prisoners on the island are described by most visitors as being totally inadequate. The authorities state that eight doctors are in regular attendance at the camp, but the visiting journalists all spoke of a serious shortage of medicines and other medical equipment. In less than two and a half years, sixty-five prisoners have died in the camp. In 1971, the authorities stressed that they died not because of conditions they experienced on Buru but as a result of ailments they had before their transfer. Yet, the

Bapreru brochure states that all prisoners transferred to Buru would be subject to medical examination first, to check their physical fitness. By December 1972, the London Embassy was claiming that deaths were due not to illness but old age - a surprising shift from original claims that no one over 45 would be taken to the island. A German Catholic missionary, who has worked among the Buru prisoners for a long time, told Peter Schumacher that "the group of old and sick people is a great problem. The younger and healthy prisoners are caring for them as brothers, but there is little hope that they will survive."



*Pramudya Ananta Tur, the well-known writer, in Buru since 1969.*

#### DETAINEES' FAMILIES ON BURU

In 1972, the first group of wives and children were taken to the island. The Indonesian authorities always insist that their plans to bring the families of the Buru prisoners to the island is evidence of their humanitarianism. But the prisoners themselves, and in general, their relatives, look upon the matter very differently. When the group of journalists visited Buru, no prisoner with whom they spoke showed any desire to have his family with him. While separation from family is one of the most intolerable aspects of their life, they realise that life on Buru is totally unsuitable and far too arduous for their wives and children. (Incidentally, nothing has ever been said about how the 'socialising process' is supposed to work in the case of unmarried prisoners on Buru. They are presumably to be left to live out their lives as single men with no prospect of ever rearing a family.)

In a speech to foreign journalists in Jakarta in September 1971, the Attorney-General admitted that a survey, conducted to investigate the

attitudes of wives towards the prospects of joining their husbands in Buru had shown that 75 percent were not willing to do so, particularly because of problems for their children.

#### COMMUNITY OF 50,000?

But despite all this, the Government proceeded with plans to transport wives and children to Buru, and the first 102 families reached the island in July 1972. In October, Brigadier-General Wadli Prawirasupradja told a press conference in Jakarta that by the end of 1972, 4,500 family members will have been transported to the island and that eventually, families of all prisoners there will join their husbands or fathers, bringing the total population of the camp to 50,000 (including officers in charge).

These facts confirm reports reaching Amnesty International that pressure was being brought to bear upon families to go to Buru. One source has reported that wives were presented with the bleak alternative of joining their husbands on Buru or divorcing them.

At the October 1972 press conference referred to above, the Attorney-General made it quite clear that, although family members were free citizens, they would not be allowed to leave the Project. He admitted too that enormous social problems had arisen as a result of the arrival of the families. Some that he mentioned were:

Education of the children: If this were left to the fathers, the children might grow up 'dedicated communists' he said.

Communications with the outside world: Free rein could not be permitted as this may be a channel for 'subversive activities'.

Livelihood for the families: They could not be allowed to live continually from public kitchens. But economic activity to earn a livelihood would require monetisation, yet he feared that 'too much money' in the hands of the families would be used for 'subversive activities'.

**What better conclusion can be drawn than that contained in an article published in the Indonesian weekly, *Tempo* on 21st October, 1972: "People can well say that, having brought the families there, the problem of the political prisoners appears to have become more complicated than before."**

\* this and other quotations are taken from the official English translation of the Bapreru brochure.