

Victim of police raids hounded from Australia

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After being persecuted by the Howard government for alleged terrorist links and facing the prospect of forcible deportation under Australia's harsh immigration laws, Indonesian-born Jaya Basri, his wife Zahri and their two young children finally left the country on November 30.

Basri vigorously denied allegations that he was connected to the alleged terrorist organisation Jemaah Islamiah (JI). Before leaving the country, he told the media that the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) had "destroyed our lives" and that he "had enough" of the government harassment, which had traumatised his wife and children.

His home was targetted by ASIO as part of nationally-coordinated raids on Indonesian families in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth following the terrorist bombing in Bali on October 12. Heavily-armed ASIO agents and Australian Federal Police (AFP) forced their way into Basri's small apartment on October 27.

The police spent more than three hours searching the apartment, seizing passports, letters, newspaper clippings, a mobile phone, computer and other personal items. The only accusation levelled against him was that he had attended lectures given by Indonesian cleric Abu Bakar Bashir, who is accused of being JI's spiritual leader.

Basri decided to speak out against this violation of his democratic rights and with lawyer Stephen Hopper held a press conference after the raid. Basri told the media he had no connection with any terrorist organisation but feared that government authorities would attempt to persecute his family. Even as the press conference was taking place, ASIO and AFP officers were raiding the home of his father, Ali Basri.

This second raid involved over 16 government agents, beginning at 8.30am and continuing until almost 2pm. The agents forced Ali, his wife, three of his children and two grandchildren to remain in one room

while ASIO had free run of the property.

Basri's brother, 31-year-old Julian, was detained for having an expired visa during the raid and transported to Sydney's Villawood Detention Centre. Julian, who is now attempting to secure Australian residency, was led to believe that his status was dependent on a permanent residency appeal by his brother.

No one in either raid was charged with any terrorist-related offence but the persecution did not stop. Having failed to find evidence to support their allegations and concerned that Jaya Basri had spoken out publicly, the government moved against him on immigration grounds. On November 14, immigration officials arrested him for violating visa regulations and took him to the Villawood Detention Centre.

Jaya Basri applied for permanent residency under the family reunion and skilled migration programs when he arrived in Australia to join his parents in 1994. His application was rejected several years later in 1999—on the grounds that his work skills were not recognised in Australia. He then lodged an appeal that was also turned down. In July 2002, he wrote to Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock seeking intervention on his behalf.

For more than three months, he received no reply. Then, in the aftermath of the ASIO raids, the immigration department sent a letter to Basri's solicitor rejecting the request. The letter arrived on November 13, allowing the solicitor no time to contact Basri, who was detained the following morning.

After a week in Villawood Detention Centre, Basri, angry and disgusted at his treatment by Australian authorities, felt he had no option but to return to Indonesia. If he chose to make another appeal for permanent residency, he would remain in detention separated from his family. Moreover, if he were finally deported, he would be permanently barred from immigrating to Australia.

Before leaving the country, he explained to the media: “It is very hard time for us but I don’t want my wife and kids to be killed here. After we got hate mail in our mailbox I have been scared for my family. I’m sad because all my family members are still in Australia, and I’m scared I won’t see them again because I have no money for fares, and my parents are getting old.”

Basri has filed a compensation claim against ASIO, alleging that he and his family were illegally detained during the raids. He has also demanded ASIO return a title to land he owns in Indonesia. He plans to sell the land to pay his debts, including a \$900 bill for his two-week detention in Villawood. The young family had to sell their furniture and belongings to pay for air tickets and other expenses, and left Sydney penniless.

Last weekend Ali Basri and his youngest son, 23-year-old Rizka, spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site*. Ali, who is employed at a Sydney auto-parts plant, immigrated to Australia in 1986 and has worked in the same job for the last 15 years. He and his wife have five children—three boys and two girls—and seven grandchildren.

“There is no doubt in my mind that Jaya would still be here in Australia if it wasn’t for the ASIO raid,” Ali said. “After the raid he moved into my home because it was safer for all of them, especially his daughter Aisyah, who was very upset and would always cry whenever he left home. We told him not to use public transport to go to work.

“I was on holidays and drove him to work and back everyday but after a few days he decided to move back to his flat. He only stayed one night. The next morning immigration authorities arrived and said they wanted to talk to him in Parramatta at the immigration department. I don’t know whether he went to Parramatta first or not but he was put in Villawood Detention Centre. They said he had violated his visa.

“Jaya wanted to make a peaceful and happy life for his family in this country. He worked as a silkscreen printer—this was his first and last job here—and was very loyal to the company. His boss liked him a lot, and especially his daughter Aisyah, and cried when he learnt what had happened.

“After being put in Villawood, Jaya lost all hope and his wife was very afraid. He rang the Indonesian embassy and they contacted the Australian government

and were told there were no other charges against him. This means he was not a terrorist suspect at all. If he really were a terrorist why would they let him go?”

“We are just an ordinary family. We work hard and do not make trouble for anyone but suddenly we’re accused of being connected with terrorists and treated like criminals—everything has changed.

“I have my son Julian in Villawood, and we want him released as soon as possible. Jaya and his family has been forced to leave Australia with nothing, with zero. This is very sad for us. Jaya has never worked before in Indonesia because he was a student, so it’s like coming to a country as a stranger and struggling to build everything anew. His children don’t know anything about Indonesia—they were born here.”

Rizka, Ali’s 23-year-old son, said: “I was very angry about the raids because they treated us worse than criminals. It was like being in a movie but unfortunately it was real. What right do they have to go through everyone’s property in this way? They even took my ATM card and pin number. I don’t know why they needed the pin number but they took it anyway.

“When I wanted to go to the toilet I could only go if they had someone standing behind me. I became agitated and asked could I get a smoke. They let me but when I came back they searched the cigarette packet. This is completely stupid. Do they think that I could be hiding a weapon in a cigarette packet? This sort of harassment has made all of us feel paranoid and nervous. This is a very bad situation.”



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