



# No 'buts' for Rudd on death

**T**HE word from Jakarta is that the three ringleaders of the murderous 2002 bombings that devastated Bali's tourism industry and killed more than 200 people — including Indonesians and Australians — are running out of time.

Imam Samudra, Ali Gufron (alias Muhklas) and his younger brother, Amrozi, have exhausted their judicial appeals and have declined to seek clemency.

Many Australians will be happy with them facing a firing squad. Few would dispute that the bombers have committed truly appalling crimes.

Some of the bomb survivors and families of victims will see it as just vengeance, and a few may even see it as not harsh enough.

Reactions from most Indonesians will be similar. After all, Jemaah Islamiyah, is a terrorist group that has killed many more Indonesians than foreigners.

But, despite universal revulsion for the bombers and their actions, these executions pose a real dilemma for the Rudd Government.

The natural political instinct will be to endorse the execution, as Rudd's predecessor, John Howard, did on several occasions.

But this directly endangers the three Australians who are also waiting on Indonesia's death row



Myram Sukamaran, Andrew Chan and Scott Rush, members of the Bali Nine group that tried to import around 8kg of heroin into Australia.

And we can be sure that whatever Canberra says about the fate of the Bali bombers will be remembered by Indonesia when the young Australians turn comes around.

Howard's ill-judged remark that he didn't see why anyone would consider execution barbaric for the bombers was thrown back in his face when Australia sought clemency from Singapore for Australian drugs offender Tran.

He was hanged regardless.

Sadly, we can be sure that more Australians will find their way on to death rows overseas.

There are two important points.

Although Howard ignored it, opposition to the death penalty has long been firm bipartisan policy, reiterated by successive state and federal governments. Endorsing execution of anyone, anywhere, breaches that principled position.

Second, if you oppose the death

penalty, there is no room for buts. By exempting certain crimes from the ban, you are endorsing execution.

What follows is inevitably a subjective argument about which particular crimes deserve death.

This is an argument Australia will not win, not least because in most of South-East Asian drugs offences are, rightly or wrongly, often seen by authorities as being as bad as murder.

This means that the Rudd Government, both for high-minded reasons of principle and in order not to endanger the lives of young Australians, must not follow Howard's example and gloat over Indonesia's executions, no matter who is being shot.

And it cannot gloss over it by saying that it is an internal matter for Indonesia's legal system, because that is true also of the fate of the Bali Nine.

Attorney-General Robert McClelland was carpeted for saying it before the election, but let's hope Labor now has the guts to spell it out for Indonesia and everyone: Australia opposes the death penalty for anyone, for any crime, anywhere, anytime.

And yes, even for the Bali bombers.

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