

judge said.

The dissenting opinion came from justice Maria Farida Indrati, who said the 1965 law had many shortcomings relating to the fundamental amendments on human rights in the Constitution.

"With the many problems that have often triggered arbitrary actions in the implementation of this law ... I think that the petition should have been granted," she said.

Maria was also the only judge that took an opposing stance in a previous court ruling on the pornography law.

In many instances, minority Islamic sects have been targets of harassment, violence and expulsion from their communities. A plaintiff, Poengky Indarti of Imparsial (The Indonesian Human Rights Monitor), said "the dictatorship of the majority has contributed [to the decision]."

"It is very disappointing that the Constitutional Court, which is sup-

Thou shalt not review: Nine judges read out their verdict on Monday at the final hearing of a request for the Constitutional Court to review the controversial 1965 Law on Blasphemy. The court dismissed the request filed by human rights, democracy and pluralism groups as well as the late former president Abdurrahman Wahid.

posed to be the guardian of the constitution, is not doing its job well," she said.

Petitioners, comprising human rights groups and self-proclaimed backers of pluralism, filed for the judicial review request of the law last October.

The court has since heard the views of 49 experts in 12 hearings.

The verdict reading Monday invoked a cry of joy in the courtroom, with dozens of supporters from various Islamic groups shouting "Allahu Akbar! [Allah is great]" the mo-

ment presiding judge Mahfud MD declared the petition was turned down.

The groups had rallied in front of the court's building during each hearing.

During the final hearing last month, members of the Islam Defenders' Front clashed with a hearing attendee and members of the team of lawyers for the petitioners.

After Monday's hearing, a lawyer for the petitioners, M. Choirul Anam, said the court "would be held responsible if religious clashes

grew even bigger after it decided to uphold the law that was the root of such conflicts".

"The court does not believe that our society has a wiser mechanism to deal with possible conflicts," he added.

The panel of judges said it had decided to take a "middle course" as suggested by a court expert, noted scholar Jalaludin Rakhmat, to give an official interpretation of the law without repealing it.

This interpretation includes giving new meaning to the explanation

of Article 1 in the law, which states that aside from acknowledging six religions, the state "leaves alone" followers of other religions.

"The phrase 'leaves alone' has to be interpreted as [their followers not being] obstructed and even given the right to flourish and thrive; it cannot be interpreted as 'ignored,'" judge Muhammad Alim said.

The judges said the law was imperfect and that they could understand requests to revise the 45-year-old law.

The state recognizes Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism,

aviation sector, mostly in Europe and is now having worldwide implications. The scale of the economic impact [on aviation] is now greater than 9/11 when US airspace was closed for three days," Bisignani said.

"We must move away from this blanket closure and find ways to flexibly open air space, step by step."

Airline shares fell in early trade on Monday and European Union competition chief Joaquin Almunia said the EU Commission is considering easing stringent rules for state aid to airlines.

British Airways, which says it has lost £15-20 million (\$22-30 million) a day in passenger and freight revenue said it had asked the EU and national governments for compensation.

Millions of passengers have been stranded or had their travel disrupted.

European transport ministers were due to discuss the airspace crisis after a meeting of the European aviation control agency Eurocontrol, which said on Monday it expected between 8,000 and 9,000 flights to operate in Europe.

That would represent just 30 percent of normal flight traffic, compared to earlier predictions by European Union officials that half of flights could be operating on Monday. Austria and the Czech Republic opened their airports on Monday. Some countries opened their airspace but others kept no-fly decrees in place. Italy closed its northern airspace after briefly opening it on Monday.

Businesses dependent on fast air freight felt the early impact of the disruption.

European Union Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht said the EU's economy will face serious consequences if the disruption continues for a long time. "What makes me a little bit afraid is that there is no timer on this volcano," he told Reuters.

Some food suppliers were also feeling the effects.

Airlines have called for a review of no-fly decrees after conducting test flights at the weekend without any apparent problems from the ash cloud.

Dutch airline KLM, which has flown several test flights, said most European airspace was safe despite the plume of ash, and dispatched two commercial freight flights to Asia on Sunday.

But engine damage was found in a NATO F-16 fighter plane, underscoring the dangers to aircraft flying through the ash cloud, a senior US official said on Monday.

Iceland's Meteorological Office said the erupting volcano appeared to be spewing more steam and less ash into the sky.

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PLANE ACCIDENT

Motorcycle collides with plane, killing two

Multa Fidrus

THE JAKARTA POST/TANGERANG

Two people riding a motorcycle died after hitting a training plane that was landing at the Indonesian State Aviation School Budiarto airbase in Curug, Tangerang regency, Banten, on Monday.

Legok Police chief Insp. Rahmat identified the two victims as Yopie Hermawan, 16, a senior high-school student who lived in Kemuning village, Legok, Tangerang regency, and Azumar, 24, a resident of Timur kampong, Serang, Banten, who worked at a minimarket.

Azumar was driving the motorcycle when the accident happened.

"The bodies of the victims were sent to the Tangerang General Hospital morgue for post-mortem examination," said Rahmat, adding that the bodies were later sent to their families Monday evening.

Chairman of the aviation school Darwin Amini said the accident occurred at about 8:30 in the morning when two students, Teza Aria Putra and Supaska Abdillah, were landing a Tobago TB10 training aircraft.

The plane, under the controls of Supaska and his flying instructor Teza Ariaputra, was landing when the motorcycle hit its right wing and the pilots lost control.

"The plane then rolled 100



meters from the runway," Darwin said.

He said the motorists had died instantly.

The two flight students were rushed to Siloam Gleneagles Hos-

pital in Karawaci with serious head and leg injuries.

The hospital's deputy director Mangantar Marpaung said a team of doctors had operated on both victims Monday afternoon.

"As of now, they are still unconscious. They will be treated intensively here," he said.

Many local residents use the restricted airfield as a short cut to the nearby main road.

Residents living on the eastern side of the runway have cut a hole in the airfield's fence so that they can enter the compound on motorcycle or foot.

The National Transportation Safety Commission sent a team led by Toos Sanjoto and Santosi to investigate the incident.

"Preliminary information gathered in the field showed that motorists frequently cross the runway as a shortcut," he said.

Udin Samsudin, a relative of Yopie, one of victims who died in the accident, admitted that using the runway as a shortcut was dangerous.

"We realized that [the runway area] was not for public use but officers have never banned people from using the runway so we just use it as a shortcut," he said.

Transportation Ministry spokesman Bambang Supriyadi Ervan said residents often cut through the fence and then placed a plank of wood over the adjacent gutter to make the shortcut accessible to motorcycles.

"They want to save time and don't consider the risks of their action," he said.

Bambang asked local residents to raise awareness that driving on the airstrip was illegal and dangerous.