
Chris Manning and Peter van Diermen (eds.), *Indonesia in Transition: Social Aspects of Reformasi and Crisis*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and ZED Books, 2000, pp. 379pp.

Words which, perhaps, come closest to capturing the essence of the time covered by this volume and the tentativeness, indeed the very precariousness of the Indonesia's future are:

In the last days of May, 1998, as the Soeharto era drew to a close, it appeared that we in Indonesia might finally have escaped our historical pattern of violence and state suppression. Since then, an intensive, frustrating, confusing and anxiety-ridden process of political change (*reformasi*) has been taking place. . . . What remains to be seen is whether the current reform process will provide the means to create a new kind of democracy, and if it will bring a cessation of violence. (Katyasungkana, p. 259).

The years that follow provide a partial "yes" and a partial "no" answer. To be sure, elections have been held and governments changed. East Timor has become independent, albeit still on a rocky road, without leading to the general unravelling of Indonesia. New and more flexible dispensations have been reached, notably with Aceh province following an armed insurrection over the previous three decades. This book suggests a good deal of uncertainty about the future of Indonesia as a viable and stable entity. Thus far, the bleakest predictions have not come to pass, though one would be hard pressed to claim that all the problems of the economy, governance and the environment have been effectively addressed.

Indonesia in Transition records the proceedings of the

1999 Indonesia Update Conference with editorial commentary. This annual event convened by the Australian National University covers a variety of facets of Indonesian politics, economy and social life including its international relations, especially those with Australia.

In fact, the collection exhibits a certain preoccupation with Australian-Indonesian relations. Australia, which had initially approved Indonesia's unilateral annexation of East Timor in 1975, found itself *circa* 1998 promoting a referendum on the future of East Timor and, the following year, leading a United Nations mandated peace keeping force. For years, Indonesians, especially the national military forces had, been conditioned to think of East Timor as an inseparable part of national territory. The sudden decolonization in the midst of a larger political and economic crisis led many Indonesians to regard Australia as having betrayed Indonesia's national integrity. A terrible campaign of terror unleashed in East Timor by military created militias while the Australian led peacekeeping force was being deployed sealed the outcome. Nevertheless, one senses a certain hesitancy on the part of several of the authors, especially the Australians, to speak candidly. This sensitivity is especially interesting in light of a questioning in Chapters 8 and 9 of just how much actual influence over Indonesia Australia actually has.

The timing of the publication is significant on two counts. First, it is a necessarily imperfect record of a period of considerable turmoil and change. This, it must be added, is a reflection of when the book is being reviewed not of any deficiency on the part of the editors or authors. More recent material will be found in the proceedings of the Indonesia Update Conferences from 2000 through 2007.

Some momentous post-publication events include the elections of the governments of Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001-04) and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004 - present), the Asian Tsunami of December 2004 which wreaked enormous physical devastation and loss of life, especially in Aceh Province, the subsequent Aceh peace agreement leading to a new constitutional disposition, including the election of an ex-combatant as its new Governor. Some of these events have been earth shaking — in the Tsunami case, literally so. Though somewhat time-bound, the book will remain a very useful resource to all students of Indonesia.

The second reason for dwelling on the time of publication is the very significance of 1999 as a watershed moment in Indonesia's history. The 1999 Conference follows almost immediately on the heels of the 1997-98 Southeast Asia financial crisis (soon to become a period of international economic turbulence) which caused severe dislocation in the whole region but proved especially devastating to Indonesia. Because the crisis was at least as much political as it was economic, it led to the departure of the corrupt Soeharto dictatorship after thirty-one years of monopolized power. This regime change took place in the midst of national turmoil, accompanied by civil ethnic and religious strife and orchestrated violence. A truly historic event of the period was the 1988 East Timor referendum which led to its independence.

The book covers all of these events well and with immediacy — the B.J. Habibie led interregnum, the 1999 election of the People's Representative Council, the intensively negotiated process which produced the first government not tied to the Soeharto "New Order" period and led by Abdurrahman Wahid as President and Megawati Sukarnoputri as Vice-President.

This volume's economic chapters do require particular comment. In 1999, the prevailing Washington consensus economic orthodoxy remained very much in the ascendancy, perhaps more then than now. These papers follow a very conventional approach. One quote which will serve to illustrate this is:

. . . Indonesia has had a good experience in its rendezvous with "marketization". The deregulation of the second half of the 1980s was essentially a positive experience and increased the constituency for a market economy. The term "market economy", or the even more value-laden term of "capitalism", no longer has negative connotations. (Simanjuntak, p. 73).

Though it is impossible to anticipate what anyone will write about anything, one is inclined to wonder if a current rendering of this topic might not be at least slightly more nuanced.

This collection of papers covers a good deal of ground, including the state of the economy, the dynamics of *reformasi* (political reform), elections and formation of new governments

up to and including the then newly installed Wahid-Sukarnoputri administration, external relations (especially with Australia), the socio-economic impact of the 1997-98 economic crisis on local communities and their livelihoods, the environmental disaster, the development of civil society and legal institutions as well as the influence of Islamic religion on political and social life. Most are scholarly papers, whilst others are more in the nature of opinion pieces by activists concerned with such issues as gender, human rights and environmentalism.

That there were thirty authors involved results in some inevitable overlap as well as certain gaps and disjunctures. The chapters on the economy, for instance, are largely disconnected from those on the natural environment. Admittedly, these problems are somewhat inherent in conference paper collections such as this. Moreover, lack of mutually comprehending dialogue between economists and environmentalists is nothing new. Nevertheless, it is striking that there is hardly a word about Indonesia's environmental devastation resulting from years of crony capitalism and exploitative practices under the Soeharto regime till past page 200. In spite of any shortcomings, this remains a key resource book for any researcher of the period.

Lawrence S. Cumming

Consultant in International Development and Civil Society
Ottawa, Ontario
