

# Indonesia's Democracy on Trial

by ABM Ziaur Rahman

The first major problem that President Wahid had to face vis a vis the military was regarding the removal of the Coordinating Minister for Political Affairs and Security, Gen. Wiranto from his cabinet. The situation became so tensed that the US warned the army of the consequences of a possible coup. Although, a risky gamble, Wahid survived that attempt in establishing authority.



Indonesian military chief Admiral Widodo Adisucipto (R) looks on as his Singapore counterpart Lieutenant-General Bey Soo Kiang (C) shakes hands with Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid during their meeting at the Presidential Palace in Jakarta 28 February 2000.

NEWS on Indonesia have been occupying the headlines for several years. Initially the reason was Indonesia's miraculous economic growth, being the member of the vibrant ASEAN economy, and later economic turmoil. But of late, it is due to the political turmoil coupled with secessionist tendency in Indonesia.

Indonesia has been undergoing political, social and economic turmoil, much of which has been the creation of long years of autocratic rule. Installation of a democratic government thereby is supposed to salvage the country from the ongoing turmoil. The Indonesian economy has not improved much since then. Secessionist tendency that flared up after the independence of East Timor has now spilled over throughout the country. Other regions like Aceh, Ambon, North Maluku, Irian Jaya and Lombok have also raised their voice to secede from Indonesia and the growth of violence concerning that issue have made the people fearful of the prospect of the existence of Indonesia as a federal structure.

This article attempts to focus on impediments and prospects of the flourishing of democracy in Indonesia.

**Legacy of military rule:** During Suharto period, to facilitate and strengthen his autocratic regime, the Indonesian military has been allowed to interfere in almost every spheres of the country's administrative machinery. The armed forces mostly ran the outer provinces as their own fief, and in a brutal fashion. Even seats in the Indonesian parliament were reserved for the military. In East Timor, the military armed and backed shadowy militias who terrorised the population and went on the rampage when it opted for independence. All this has discredited the armed forces in the eyes of many Indonesians. Military still dominates the administrative machinery.

In the three months since he took office, President Wahid has been engaged in what his aides call "psychological war" with the military, gradually whittling away at the general's grip at the levers of power. He has taken steps towards putting the armed forces under civilian control. Mostly the battle has been about separating the palace staff from the five other departments that make up the State Secretariat, the 3,000-strong body that handles the executive's administrative chores. In a bid to bring army under civilian control, he signed a decree that would require any officer serving the cabinet resign his military position. He signed an edict depriving the president's four adjutants of the right to monitor Wahid's visitors and outgoing correspondence. The number of senior military officers in the president's office has been pared down from 15 to 35, with three generals among 20 officers who got their marching orders. The President has announced that in six years' time the armed force would lose all their seats in the parliament. He has also broken new ground by picking a civilian for the post of defense minister and an admiral, who is seen as more neutral, as commander of the armed forces.

The first major problem that President Wahid had to face vis a vis the military was regarding the removal of the coordinating Minister for Political Affairs and Security, Gen. Wiranto from his cabinet. The situation became so tensed that the US warned the army of the consequences of a possible coup. Although, a risky gamble, Wahid survived that attempt in establishing authority. Wahid's dismissal of Gen. Wiranto symbolizes the political end of Suharto's New Order Regime — something that was not accomplished when the Suharto was brought down in May 1998. US Ambassador to the UN Richard Holbrooke declared Washington's sympathy for Indonesia's reform efforts, "because what we are watching is a great drama, a struggle between the forces of democracy and reform and the forces of backward looking corruption and militarism."

The president is in a precarious position regarding the reform of the Indonesian military. If he pushes the reform too far, the disgruntled officers could try to destabilise the government. But Wahid needs the active support of the strong central control of the military in order to keep the diverse archipelago within a single nation. At the same time he cannot grant the illegal privileges that the military used to enjoy during the autocratic regimes. So he cannot afford to push away the military too far or draw it too close that his own existence or democracy comes under threat. So he has to deal with the reform business in a cautious and delicate manner.

In addition to the reforms in

the military, structural reform of the administrative machinery is necessary to bring efficiency and curb the impediments towards the growth of democracy.

**Ethno-religious cleavages:** Political analysts have pointed out that the existence of ethnic groups is one of the major hindrances on the path of the flourishing of democracy in a country. Indonesia is essentially a pluralist society, comprising of diverse cultures, religions and ethnic groups. It is hard to restore unity in such an extremely diverse country. The problem of the minority, if not properly addressed, always carries the risk of disintegrating the country. As, in a democracy, the opinion of the majority, in most of the cases, goes against the interest of the minorities. Ever since its independence, the problems of the ethnic tribes were there but they were not so intense until the recent economic doldrums. Under the autocratic rule the interests of the minorities were kept unattended. But with the establishment of democracy, those demands surfaced as the demands and aspirations of the suppressed minorities became more hopeful of the realization of their demands. Indonesia — crippled by debt, pulled taut by regional resentments, driven by religious and ethnic divides — remains a land unable to adopt easily to the rules of nationhood.

A belief has grown among officials and observers that much of the violence in the country — from North Maluku, Ambon and Lombok in the Southeast to tiny Bontone Island and Aceh in the west — is either partly or wholly due to manipulation and incitement by elements of the Suharto-era military machine, loosely linked Islamic militants and vested business interests, all aimed at sowing doubts about Wahid's ability to rule. The military has strongly denied the allegations. An end to the separatist bloodshed in Aceh and the Muslim-Christian violence in Moluccan islands — the thorniest task facing the new government — is also vital for Indonesia's economic recovery.

Wahid has made efforts to redress their wrongs. He hopes to talk the restless provinces round offering them greater autonomy and a larger share of

the profits made from their natural resources. It has been observed that the Indonesian navy has been more effective in maintaining order and curbing secessionist tendency in that archipelago. The appointment of an admiral for the post of the Chief of the Armed Staff is one sign that the government is effectively trying to curb the secessionist tendency. Irian Jaya has also been allowed to change its name to Papua. His trips abroad helped to ensure that foreign help was unavailable to other Indonesian provinces, such as Aceh and Irian Jaya, where separatists are also hoping to break away. After meeting Wahid, East Asian leaders declared their support for his attempts to maintain the integrity of Indonesia. East Timor was correctly seen as a special case.

Apart from the secessionist tendency, there is the rising anti-Chinese tide among the Indonesian populace. That is a dangerous sign for their economy since the Chinese community could play an important role to revitalize Indonesian economy. The autocratic regimes have totally alienated them but since the revitalization of the economy is important, the Wahid government is assuring the Chinese community of all kinds of assistance. While some analysts have described effective democracy as the foe of the ethnic groups but it should not be forgotten that tolerance is one of the chief virtues of democracy. And democracy is supposed to accommodate diversity for greater national interests.

### Economic reconstruction:

The major challenge that Wahid will have to face is the revitalization of Indonesian economy. If he fails to carry out the necessary economic reforms to restructure the economy within a short time, then he would certainly have to face tougher challenges than those he is facing now. As one observer has pointed out, people usually overlook the failures of the government until the state of the economy is healthy.

If the President failed to remove General Wiranto from his cabinet, he would be judged to have completely lost his grip on power. That could shatter what little confidence there is in Indonesia's economic recovery. It

could also inflame passions in the country's provinces, several of which are convulsed by communal or separatist violence. But the real danger is the one that remains: a sustained attack on Wahid's ability to govern in the form of a campaign to destabilize the country. It is the sort of campaign that the armed forces have already shown themselves quite capable of orchestrating.

If Wahid's government could be made to look ineffective, then any soldiers anxious to recover their influence and privileges would soon see to it that their cronies took over the reins of power. Even the long-distance order to sack the general may have been an unconvincing show of strength at which the President, for the time being, has won.

With Muslim interests tugging on one flank and the military on the other, Wahid seems to be indispensable in international eyes. As a result, the World Bank would inject \$1.5 billion to revitalize Indonesian economy. In addition to that, an IMF official said, \$2 billion of existing debt is likely to be rescheduled this year. Those would seem as victory, as was a positive market reaction to his austere and realistic budget for the year 2000. Meanwhile the countries economically vital, predominantly Christian-Chinese business community, historically a target of mob violence in Indonesia, is also rallying around the president.

Lack of accountability is the fundamental flaw in the economy and is at the heart of the new agreement Wahid signed with the IMF in mid-January. Accountability is crucial for foreign investment in Indonesia. Without investment from abroad, the Wahid administration can't hope to restructure corporate Indonesia's \$70 billion foreign debt and sell assets controlled by the Indonesian Bank Restructuring Agency, or IBRA.

It is, however, widely felt that nothing can be done about the economy until the problem with the military is solved. The impression that Wahid doesn't have a firm handle on his government in standing in the way of billions of dollars in potential foreign investment. The removal of Wiranto could correct this, particularly if as ex-

pected, it convinces some of his political opponents to back off. It could even help remove Indonesia's investment climate.

**Absence of democratic principles and practices:** Unlike autocratic rules, the flourishing of democracy requires a long tradition and the existence of a democratic mind-set among the people. Long years of autocratic rule has not been helpful for the growth of those ideals. Moreover, democracy in one country affects the political culture of its neighbours. Lack of effective democracy and its ingredients in other ASEAN countries has hampered and still hampers the growth of democracy in Indonesia.

According to Amartya Sen, autocratic regimes are not sympathetic to the poor since they don't have to be worried about being elected later. So in an autocracy, aspects of social welfare are not addressed properly. Observers are optimistic that since democracy is the most effective tool for the restoration of the basic human rights. The Indonesia people and the government are likely to be eager to restore the democratic institutions in order to strengthen the pillars of democracy. Indonesian leaders out of the temptation of being re-elected in a democracy, would certainly work to strengthen its pillars from their own interest.

**Absence of democratic institutions:** Transparency, good governance, equal distribution of resources, pro-people policies and accountability are some of the basic ingredients of democracy. Active and vibrant civil society, free press and the electronic media, decentralization and separation of power and are some of the most vital conditions to ensure the functioning of those ingredients. But long years of autocratic rule obstructed their growth in Indonesia. This has happened not in Indonesia alone but the same is true in case of other ASEAN countries.

In his book *Asian Eclipse*, Michael Backman argues that the damage wrought on each Asian country was in direct proportion to the amount of cronyism and corruption, the paucity of legal structures and corporate accountability, and the general lack of ethics prevailing there. On all those measures Indonesia scored the worst and was hit the hardest. In 1998 the economy contracted by nearly 14 per cent, and the inflation at one point soared to more than 80 per cent. With rising prices and growing unemployment, social unrest turned to riots. President Suharto took his time before admitting that his government was part of the problem, but in May 1998 he eventually resigned.

One of the presidential advisers said: "He has been educating the people for 15 years on the importance of civil rights and civilian supremacy." So Wahid, with help of Indonesian civil society, is supposed to restore those democratic institutions required to strengthen nascent Indonesian democracy.

**Conclusion:** A few years ago a group of political scientists in Jakarta tried to calculate how long it might take for Indonesia to become a democracy. On their wish list was a free press, an elected president and legislature, and armed forces under civilian control. They came up with a figure of 15 years. One of the members of the group reckoned that the economic crisis so speeded up change in Indonesia that three-quarters of the wish list was achieved in just 17 months. Indonesia's rite of passage is not going to be easy, as it had not been her transition to democracy, February 12, 2000.

Performance of democracy in the last four months is too short a period for evaluation. Currently it is going through the process of 'trial and error'. The present situation has been viewed as the 'birth pang' of Indonesian democracy. Some of the observers' view that democracy in Indonesia is not only nascent but also the very idea of democracy is super-imposed and at this stage the problems Indonesia is facing are identical in all the countries with nascent stage of democracy. And the problems can be redressed by an effective democracy in the best manner and observers are optimistic that Wahid's government of 'national unity' is best suited to carry out the necessary reforms.

The success of Indonesia's democracy would encourage other countries of that region to increase transparency, efficiency and to reduce corruption. This would work to enhance the process of their development. Moreover due to its sheer size, population, resources and geographical locations it is of significant importance to the West. The West would be interested to see the continuation of the democratic process out of their 'enlightened self-interest'.

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# Back for' the Resources

Dr Mohammed Muniruzzaman travels through geothermal research institutes in Japan

Dr Tohru Mogi of the Department of Mining Engineering Kyushu University, was waiting for us when we arrived to meet him. Although 9.30 in the morning is not too early for an appointment, however, both Dr Tadashi Nakatsuka and I were a little apprehensive as we arrived at Fukuoka the night before — quite late and very exhausted. Our itinerary which was finalised before we left Tsukuba included visits to the Geothermal Power Plant at Hatchobaru, the Geothermal Research Institute at Beppu and other similar installations and institutions. Dr Mogi is a renowned expert in geothermal fields introduced us to his work through a small presentation and then talked about the geothermal power installation at Hatchobaru that we were about to visit. Hatchobaru located at Kakone-cho in the Oita Prefecture is about 90km east of Fukuoka. There are three geothermal power stations in the area, Hatchobaru, Otake, and Takigami. However, Hatchobaru is the largest of the sixteen geothermal power plants in Japan and the surrounding Kujū area where the three power plants are located is one of the most beautiful regions in Kyushu. Volcanoes in the area are renowned for their beauty and shape, as are the many well-known hot spas like Sujiya, Makinoto and Chojabaru for their therapeutic values.

In conventional thermal power generation, the steam needed to rotate the turbine to generate electricity is obtained by the combustion of oil, gas, coal etc. In geothermal power generation the steam is directly obtained from the earth. The temperature gradient near the earth's surface is about 30° C per km. Generally a depth of 30 to 50 km would produce a temperature of 1000° C and this can be regarded as a large thermal reservoir. Current technology however, is unable to utilise this heat because of the great depth. It happens, however, in geothermal zones, volcanoes, natural fumaroles, spas, the molten rock or magma of about 1000° C is located at a depth of few km or less. Water infiltrating into the underground get heated by the magma, is trapped

and forms the geothermal fluid reservoir. The utilization of the underground heat as a direct energy source is called geothermal power generation. The advantages of such power generation are obvious — effective use is made of indigenous energy source, no fuel is required and perhaps most importantly, clean and uninterrupted supply of energy is ensured.

Italy holds the distinction of being the first country in the world to generate 0.75 horsepower utilizing the natural steam at Larderello in 1904. However, its upgradation to the world's first geothermal power station was completed in 1913 and the same year it went into commercial production generating 250 kw. Italy now ranks fourth amongst all the countries producing electricity utilizing geothermal power. It currently produces close to 650 MW of power. Japan succeeded in drilling its first steam well in Beppu (1913) in the Oita Prefecture. However, it was not until 1925 that 1.25 kw of power was generated from the steam well — this was Japan's first geothermal power plant. Over the years

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looking after nature to borrow a phrase from Mogi-san the Italians let nature look after itself. Putting it in a different way, the Italians interfered very little with the natural growth of plants and trees. As we were some kilometers away from our destination Dr Mogi made a detour, drove into Oguni a small town and parked in front of a nice-looking restaurant. He invited us to a lunch of local delicacy. After a leisurely and thoroughly enjoyable lunch (we had some time to kill prior to our appointment) we headed for Hatchobaru.

### Geothermal Power Generation

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### Hatchobaru Geothermal Power Plant

In Hatchobaru district volcanic activities by the magma began about 200,000 years ago. The heat source has formed the present geothermal reservoir. Water infiltrating deep into the underground is transformed into superheated steam at 230° C to 280° C and form the geothermal fluid reservoir. The first of the two powerhouse at Hatchobaru was commissioned in 1977 and the second in 1990.

The power station has a combined capacity of 110 MW and is the largest geothermal power station in Japan. Hatchobaru has developed a unique double-flash system that utilises both high and low-pressure steam that drives turbine and generator. The mechanism in brief is steam and hot water from production wells is led in a mixed form to a steam separator. The mixed fluid is separated here into primary (high-pressure) steam and the rest water and hot water is then expanded under a reduced pressure in a flasher to generate secondary (low-pressure) steam. The primary and secondary steams are both utilised to drive the turbine/generator. The hot water from the flasher is returned to deep underground through the re-injection well. Double-flash system increases the geothermal power by as much as 20 per cent and attains more effective heat utilization than the single flash system using only steam from the production well. Most geothermal power stations are characterized by steam emanating from cooling tower in the plants. The reason was not difficult to gather. Generally, a geothermal power station is located in a mountainous surrounding. This makes it difficult to get a large volume of water for cooling the condenser — located besides the turbine. Hot water after passing through the condenser is cooled down at the cooling tower and re-circulated.

As we moved over one section of the power complex to the next I mused on the paucity of personnel at the station. We inquired about it to the lady who was our guide and in charge of the complex then. She bowed profusely and regretted almost apologetically for having missed the point of informing us that Hatchobaru being a remote, inaccessible mountainous area is an unattended geothermal power station. All operations including the difficult ones of generator outputs, turbine revolutions etc. are supervised and controlled by a tele-control system by operators stationed in Otake about 2 km away. It was indeed our turn to be surprised and bow in admiration.

**Future Outlook**  
The geothermal power does not require fuel and is a clean energy source not polluting the air. It is thus an environment friendly — power source. Geothermal power currently occupies a small share in Japan's energy mix. Nonetheless, utilizing important indigenous energy resource and sharing a part of energy diversification programme, it greatly contributes to the nation's stable power source with-

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