

Fighting for Democracy - Indonesia

By Peter Fanning

I was due to leave my office on the 24th floor at 4.00pm on Monday February 9. At around 3.00 pm, I looked down into the 14 lane street and toll road over the top of my computer. I could see a small demonstration slowly making its way along Jalan Gatot Subroto, heading towards the national headquarters. It was an orderly protest against the rising cost of food. I thought, damn! That's going to hold me up because that is the direction in which I intended to head. But the leader of that demonstration had bigger concerns than my trivial pursuits. It was (I learned later) Pius Lustrilanang, a graduate of the law school at the Parahyangan Catholic University in Bandung. He disappeared shortly after that afternoon. Soeharto's son-in-law Prabowo, former Kopassus and Kostrad Commander, has now admitted responsibility for his and many other such political abductions.

After torture (in a location yet to be identified) Pius was released, told his story, and fled overseas. He returned after Soeharto's downfall, and is now part of the huge movement towards a democratic Indonesia. He is a member of moderate Moslem leader Amien Rais' newly formed National mandate Party (PAN).

Another demonstration in early May that reveals the complexity of life in Jakarta was by a group of young girls from a Moslem university carrying placards with the plaintiff cry (in Bahasa Indonesia): We can no longer afford to be beautiful! They were serious.

Also in May brokers demonstrated on the footpath of Jalan Sudirman outside the Jakarta Stock Exchange.

But it was the academics and students who were having most to say. And their involvement was hastened to its climax when the agents of chaos fired down into the campus of the prestigious Trisakti University from an elevated overpass during the afternoon of Tuesday May 12. Four students died.

Soeharto eventually came to power out of the chaos which erupted after the murders of the core of the army leadership on the night of September 30, 1955. It is generally believed (but may never be proved one way or the other) that similar chaos was now being created for similar reasons - to alter the power structure within the Armed Forces (ABRI). The plan backfired, the master and the ap-

prentice tripped, and democracy may be the unexpected prize.

I tapped away in my office on my computer through Wednesday May 13 (as peaceful morning on campus at Trisakti became matched by ugly scenes on the streets). Troop-carrying police helicopters cruised past in the distance at computer height, between ABRI headquarters away to the south, and the Grogol area of Trisakti University somewhere near the smoke plume up the now closed toll road to my right. Phoned reports of a police station and numerous cars being torched reached the office.

The office fax report tells me that I sent a fax to Australia at 11.09am on the next day, Thursday May 14th. I reported that Soeharto, still in Cairo, had raised the possibility of stepping aside. Shortly after that, we decided to close the office. Reports of real trouble were filtering in, and staff were concerned about security at home. I sent another fax later that afternoon from my home which started: Today has turned out worse than we expected. What an understatement. We did not yet know the tragic truth. Away to the North, out of sight, Chinatown was already ablaze. Smoke plumes drifted into the distant sky in scattered locations in all directions, as cars were torched or shopping centres looted and wrecked.

Christine, a university student in our household, was regularly on the phone during the day. She had daringly joined other students moving off the University of Indonesia campus on Jalan Salemba early in the day (a stone's throw from where earlier students had 'persuaded' first president Soekarno to declare Indonesia's independence at 10.00am on 17 August 1945 at Jalan Pengansaan No 56).

Some say Soekarno had a gun pointing at him on that occasion - or at least that had been the case the night before when the students had kidnapped him to begin the process of persuasion. And his former aide Soekardjo has recently reported that the same Soekarno had a gun at his head when he signed the famous, but missing, letter of March 11 1966 asking the presumed architect of chaos, Soeharto, to restore order in the country.

Christine and her fellow students were persuaded by the police to return to campus during Thursday morning. Police (a part of ABRI) had been allowing student rallies, as long as they stayed on campus (the police later had their office just down Jalan Salemba

burned). Late in the afternoon she phoned to say that the students believed they were trapped on campus but that the lecturers were becoming a little concerned that the mobs might for some reason descend on the University. But she was able to get an uneventful ride home in the early evening. At around the time she last phoned us the Wall's Ice Cream Vendor tooted past our house in inner suburban Tebet, with its frozen Cornettos and Magnums. In a fax sent at 5.00pm I reported regarding "Chinese-Indonesian and family (ie. Soeharto) businesses being targeted". It was already that obvious. A little later the first images of piles of charred bodies appeared on the local Television.

On Friday May 15 we stayed home. People were mobilising at grass roots level to defend themselves. The head (ketua) of our neighbourhood association (rukun tetangga) closed the light boom gate at the end of our street, and kept it closed for the next week - it was closed every night at 10.30 anyway: the ketua of the next level of local administration, the rukun warga, makes sure there is always at least one way left open in the area for people to drive home - but you have to be local to know it. The RT and RW Ketua throughout the city had residents on the streets all night ready for any attack. But the main enemy for most, certainly in this area, was rumour not reality. During the afternoon of May 15, Pos Indonesia delivered my Diners Club account with a cheery blast on the little motorbike horn.

On that Friday evening, we drove less than a kilometre to buy martabak for dinner from a footpath warung. It was outside our local supermarket, which to our surprise had been totally looted and wrecked. The restaurant on one side and the small private hospital on the other, and all other buildings in the area, were untouched.

On Saturday we drove through some of the worst-hit areas of Jakarta. Street sweepers (manual not mechanical) had almost finished cleaning the streets. Car bodies were being winched onto trucks. Human bodies were still found in the smokey remains in the centre of Chinatown. Monstrous Centurion tanks clanked along, their crews of mauve-bereted marines politely signalling us past, and responding to waves with a smile. These were ABRI Commander Wiranto's liberators, regarded as saving the city and the nation from the possible clutches of Prabowo and his crack Kopassus supporters.

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We were back in the office on Monday. Students had begun to gather at Parliament House. I went home after work to quieten troubled nerves there, rather than go on my weekly run in the hills.

On Tuesday I received a phone call while still on my way to the office - the partners had decided to let staff stay home for the next couple of days because of growing nervousness about Wednesday. This was to be the 90th Anniversary of the founding of Boedi Utomo, one of the first (very intellectual) nationalist organisations - Hari Bangkit Nasional (National Awakening Day). A giant freedom rally was planned by Amien Rais centred on the National Monument Square in central Jakarta.

On Wednesday I needed some fax paper and drove out to find the city closed down. Overnight ABRI had barricaded all major roads leading to central Jakarta. Soldiers leaned casually against their tanks, and bought *tehu* and fried bananas from *Kaki lima*, the little mobile food carts (Amien Rais received credits for calling his rally, but I think the barricades came first). There were no issue and no protest. ABRI Commander Wiranto ensured that students got safely to the confines of the Parliament House enclosure by driving them there from their campuses in army buses.

Thursday May 21 was a public holiday - the Catholic Ascension Thursday. I got up late, opened the newspaper to read Soeharto was expected to announce his resignation at 9.00am, and turned on the television on just in time to catch the end of it (though during the day I saw more replays than of Sluggers pulling down yet another screamer in front of goal). Habibie immediately stepped to centre stage before he was firmly repositioned to one side by protocol until he had taken his (Moslem) oath of presidential office, and then allowed to stand in the centre of the red carpet.

I still needed that fax paper, and we shopped at the upmarket *Pasaraya Manggarai* in east central Jakarta just across the river from *Jalan Salemba*. Rumour had it that it had been stripped. It was untouched. We brought some crystal on special, and some food supplies in the basement *Hero* supermarket (yet miles away outside Jakarta to the south west on the *Merak* tollroad, the giant *Lippo* supermall at *Karawaci* had been totally looted and disabled and partially burned and wrecked. Loss adjusters have advised a reserve of

US\$50 million and London reinsurers are trying to make some legal sense of the event). After shopping, we decided that the occasion called for a drive through the tiny *Jalan Cendana*, Soeharto's Street. But a marine flicked us away with a little wave of his hand.

On Friday May 22 we were back in the office, and chose to become part of history by joining the students within the Parliamentary compound during the afternoon. Stern-faced soldiers checked us through the gates, but inside security was in the quiet hands of very tired-looking students. They were separating students from non-students (everyone must carry ID) and keeping non-students well back from the Parliament buildings. There was a verbal confrontation going on between very vocal Moslem youth group *Habibie* supporters and the students who were insisting that Soeharto and *Habibie* were a team, and continuing to demand that both must go. The students were being very careful that their rally was not corrupted and hijacked by provocateurs. We stayed a while, lined up for a photo with some marine guards just inside the gates, and then went back to the office (some foreign press later reported a wild confrontation between the students and thousands of *Habibie* supporters. I must have been at a different Parliament House in a different Indonesia).

Later that night there was a very tense stand-off between rival ABRI forces, as Wiranto loyalists finally persuaded unwilling students to leave and then guided their (ABRI-supplied) buses through lines of *Prabowo* sympathisers itching to hit them hard. The short bus trip between Parliament and the nearby *Atma Jaya* Catholic University of Indonesia, where the students finally agreed to go, took up to two hours, with the operation ending at about 2.00 am.

Thus has begun the complex process of forging a new democracy under a leader who has regarded Soeharto as a father, without institutions of democracy, with an economy shaken to its foundation, by people who have only a theoretical knowledge of authority is ABRI, though under control of the very capable Wiranto, who has charted a remarkable course of careful compromise through very troubled waters.

This is not to say that public administration has collapsed - it has not. And there is

ample expertise among advisers and potential leaders. The foundations are already in place: any inadequacy of the Constitution of 1945 lies mainly in its deliberate brevity. It was intended that it be further developed long before this. But Soekarno who reinstated it in 1959 and then Soeharto had no intention of letting this happen - they abused its brevity, indeed claimed it stated things that it clearly did not.

Most importantly, the clear statement in the elucidation regarding the judicial powers of chapter IX, that they are to be "free from the influence of the Government's authority", was simply ignored. Inconvenient laws such as that covering bankruptcy (in place since 1906) were declared "opaque" and likewise ignored.

But change is in the air, for the time being under the control of the enigmatic (or simply undecided) President *Habibie*. People realise that it will take time to put necessary new law in place. Therefore the meeting of the 1000 person Peoples Consultative Assembly set for November 10 is awaited with great anticipation and some impatience. But *Habibie* appears to be doing more than just waiting - he shows some signs of wanting to dismantle the Soeharto machine which he oiled so energetically. There are suggestions there is no longer direct communication between Soeharto and himself. The enigma is whether this is real or for show.

But the people are strong and patient, and above all want a peaceful life. Unfortunately at the moment they are not united. The long-suppressed repugnance for the excesses of the Soeharto era, in which a few high profile Chinese Indonesians were an essential element, has flowed over into a reawakening of the long-standing anti-Chinese sentiment. This disease must be cured, or at least against suppressed to controllable levels.

The country abounds in natural and human wealth. The rice fields (*sawah*) around Jakarta and elsewhere are bursting with produce. The nation will survive and recover. But for each one of its 202 million people, there is a different opinion as to how long that will take - not if, but how long.