

Military dominates Habibie's cabinet

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Just four days after the resignation of Suharto and the installation of B.J. Habibie as president, the political situation in Indonesia is highly unstable. The real power behind the new regime remains the Indonesian military, and its forces continue to patrol the streets.

Armed forces chief General Wiranto has consolidated his position after playing the key role in orchestrating Suharto's replacement by Habibie. Over the weekend Wiranto moved against his military rivals -- ousting Suharto's son-in-law General Prabowo Subianto and Prabowo's ally General Muchdi Purwopranjono from the sensitive commands of army strategic reserve (Kostrad) and the army special forces (Kopassus) respectively.

However, divisions within the new cabinet opened up quickly, with the co-ordinating economics minister Ginandjar Kartasasmita calling for elections within one or two months. On Monday, Habibie announced that new elections would be called, dropping Suharto's initial plan for his protege to remain in office until 2003. But Habibie gave no date or details.

The entire regime is surrounded by intrigue and infighting. Factions within the military, the state apparatus, big business, the official political parties and the bourgeois opposition are manoeuvring and scheming to push their own narrow interests.

The appointment of Habibie, widely known for his expensive state-financed technology projects, has done little to bolster the regime's standing in international financial circles. US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin bluntly told the Asia Pacific Economic Forum (APEC) finance ministers' meeting last weekend it was premature to restart the International Monetary Fund bailout package without "the kind of economic and political circumstances in Indonesia that will make a program effective".

Ginandjar, who was in charge of implementing the IMF's measures under Suharto, has been retained by

Habibie in a bid to bolster market confidence. New finance minister Bambang Subianto formerly headed the bank restructuring agency set up under the IMF plan, before being sacked by Suharto earlier this year.

But it is far from clear that this regime can suppress unrest and stabilise the political situation, even in the short term. Protests involving university and high school students are continuing in the major cities, with demands for political reforms and early elections. In Jakarta and the north Sumatran city of Medan, demonstrations have called for Habibie to step down.

The essential character of the Habibie regime was revealed last Friday when army troops moved at midnight to forcibly remove about 2,000 protesting students from the national assembly compound, which they had been occupying since last Wednesday. Earlier in the day, hundreds of right-wing Muslim youth had been bussed to the building to provoke conflicts and provide the pretext for the military to act.

In the cabinet itself, the military holds four key posts. Former armed forces chief General Feisal Tanjung remains co-ordinating minister for political affairs and General Wiranto stays as defence minister. General Hendropriyono remains as transmigration minister, overseeing operations in Irian Jaya [West Papua] in particular.

General Syarwan Hamid, who was responsible for orchestrating the ousting of opposition figure Megawati Sukarnoputri from her position as head of the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) in July 1996, replaces fellow officer Hartono as interior minister.

For the first time in more than a decade, a serving military officer, General Yunus Yosfiah, has been made information minister. He commanded a marine corps unit during the 1975 invasion of East Timor and is implicated in the murder of five Australian journalists during the campaign.

Furthermore, the position of education minister, in

charge of dealing with students, has been taken by former environment minister Juwono Sudarsono, who, as former deputy governor of the military's think tank Lemhanas, is closely connected to the armed forces.

Many of the other ministerial changes are largely cosmetic. Suharto's daughter Siti Hadyanti "Tutut" Rukmanm, timber magnate and Suharto business crony Bob Hasan, and Fuad Bawazier, who handled the Suharto family's tax affairs, have been removed from the cabinet.

But 20 of Suharto's ministers remain in the 36-member ministry, including the four main coordinating ministers for political affairs, economics, development and public welfare. The dictatorship's international face remains that of long-time Suharto loyalist, Foreign Minister Ali Alatas.

A number of the new ministers have been drawn from the Association of Indonesian Moslem Intellectuals (ICMI), set up in 1990 by Habibie as a means of containing the Islamic opposition to Suharto. ICMI secretary general Adi Sasono has been made co-operatives minister. Malik Fajar, Muslim Nasution and Fahmi Idris, also from ICMI, were appointed minister for religion, forestry and plantations minister and manpower minister respectively.

Only three junior ministers are not drawn from the ruling Golkar Party, the military or the state apparatus: Hamzah Haz and Ham Saefuddin, members of the state sponsored opposition Islamic party -- the Indonesian Peoples Party (PPP) -- and Panangian Siregar, a member of the officially recognised PDI faction.

Opposition leader Amien Rais, head of the Islamic Muhammadiyah organisation, refused to join the cabinet, as did senior Megawati adviser and economist Kwik Kian Gee. After initially stating that he was "neutral" on the Habibie regime, Rais called for new elections to be held within six months.



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