

Indonesia:

Opposition council offers Habibie advice

Mike Head
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Key bourgeois opposition figures are propping up Indonesian President Habibie while urging him to call elections within a year and refusing to join his government.

An opposition council established by Islamic leader Amien Rais and former Suharto cronies has advised Habibie, widely regarded as Suharto's stooge, to try to stem an ongoing economic and political crisis by declaring his government to be transitional.

The call was issued amid signs of a deepening economic crisis, sparked by a run on the country's biggest private bank, Bank Central Asia, and other banks owned by the powerful Salim family and Suharto's sons and daughters.

The self-proclaimed People's Council or MAR (Majelis Amanat Rakyat) features former leading figures from the Suharto regime. Among them are ex-economics adviser and environment minister Emil Salim; former general and Suharto minister Rudini; Golkar (ruling party) leader Arifin Panigoro; ex-finance minister Frans Seda; and former economics adviser Muhammad Sadli. Joining them are other bourgeois opposition figures such as lawyer Adnan Buyung Nasution; Islamic scholar Nurcholish Madjid; and Bandung Technology Institute lecturer Sudjana Sapi'ie.

Warning of a "prolonged economic crisis," they called on the Habibie government to "safeguard the smooth running of the economy" and "restore national harmony". To do so, they suggested that the government declare itself to be a transitional administration "whose obligation it is to hold honest, clear and fair general elections, at the latest within six to twelve months". Those elections would nominate a new version of the Peoples Consultative Assembly, the body that two months ago rubberstamped Suharto for another five-year term.

The MAR urged Habibie's military-backed cabinet to clean out nepotism, collusion and corruption, repeal anti-democratic laws, release political prisoners and investigate the military's kidnappings and shootings. At the same time, the council is offering itself to the imperialist powers as a virtual government-in-waiting. The most revealing aspect of its call was an invitation to the two main American big business parties, the Republicans and Democrats, to send delegations to advise on democratic election procedures.



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