

# Signs of disarray in opposition alliance in Indonesian elections

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Only a few days after its formation on Monday, the alliance forged between three of the major opposition parties standing in the Indonesian elections on June 7 is showing signs of disarray.

The deal between Megawati Sukarnoputri, Amien Rais and Abdurrahman Wahid and their respective parties—the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) Struggle, National Mandate Party (PAN) and National Awakening Party (PKB)—was announced just prior to the start of the formal campaigning on Wednesday.

In their joint statement, the three sought to establish themselves as the champions of “democracy” and “reform,” warning “the reform process has not yet been completed”. The statement went on: “The power of the ‘status quo,’ which does not want to see changes, is still trying to maintain power. Therefore, we hereby unite to move the reform process forward.”

By distancing themselves from President B.J. Habibie and the ruling Golkar Party, Megawati, Rais and Wahid are hoping to capitalise on the widespread hostility to the military-backed regime that erupted over the last year and led to the forced resignation of Suharto last May. All three, however, were very much part of the “status quo” under Suharto. They retain close links with the military and state bureaucracy, and, in the course of the last 12 months, have played a crucial role in containing and suppressing the opposition of students, workers, small farmers and others to the Habibie regime.

While presenting a common front against Habibie, the opposition leaders have not reached any common agreement on policies, nor will they campaign together. Megawati has publicly opposed any form of autonomy or independence for East Timor, expressing the fear in layers of the ruling class that such a move would lead to the disintegration of Indonesia. Rais, on the other

hand, has called for the devolution of more power to provinces such as East Timor and Aceh through the transformation of Indonesia into a federation.

Differences also exist on the role of the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) with Megawati favouring the continued direct involvement of the army in politics. Rais has called for the military's extensive political role at national, provincial and local levels to be gradually phased out.

The three leaders have indicated that the party winning the greatest support in the June poll will have the backing of the other two for its candidate in the contest for the presidential post in November. Already, however, prominent figures in both PAN and the PDI-Struggle have raised doubts over the agreement.

Influential PAN supporter Umar Juoro said policy differences may mean that the party would support Habibie for the presidential position. “If Amien Rais can't get the majority to become president, then I think a large number of members from PAN will prefer to support Habibie than Megawati,” he said.

Senior Megawati adviser Laksamana Sukardi described the deal as only “preliminary” and not a promise to share power. “It will pave the way for a coalition. But we don't yet know how many votes they will have, so we can't call it a coalition yet,” he said.

Earlier in the year, Abdurrahman Wahid publicly opposed Megawati becoming president because she was a woman and a non-Muslim. Both the PKB and PAN are based among the supporters of the country's two largest Muslim organisations—Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah respectively.

According to a recent opinion poll published by the *Kompas* newspaper, more than 40 percent of voters support the three opposition parties as compared to only 14 percent for Golkar. The elections, however,

only decide 462 of the 500 seats in the House of Representatives (DPR)—the remainder being military appointees. Another 200 appointees—135 by provincial legislatures and 65 from social organisations—join with the DPR to form the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), which is due to choose the next president and vice-president in November.

Habibie and Golkar are no doubt counting on significant support from the military and civilian appointees. The Electoral Commission or KPU, which is chaired by retired General Rudini, a former army chief-of-staff and home affairs minister under Suharto, has substantial powers in presiding over appointments, particularly from social organisations.

Golkar, previously the only party permitted to organise in rural areas, has an extensive organisational structure throughout the country and can count on strong backing from sections of the military, state bureaucracy and business dependent on its favours in the past.

According to a report in the May 20 issue of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Golkar is distributing billions of rupiah in low interest loans from state-owned companies to voters across Indonesia. "In the subdistricts, party cadres have been instructed to identify loan recipients and help fill out forms. The paperwork is sent on to the state firms which are controlled by Jakarta's State-Enterprise Ministry. Later, applications are followed up by well-connected party functionaries in the capital. If the loans are approved, the cadres sometimes even help disburse them."

Although the scheme was frozen after Suharto was forced out, it was restarted in March at the request of State Enterprise Minister Tanri Abeng. Since 1994, state firms have given out about 200 billion rupiah (\$US25 billion) worth of loans each year. In early April, the release of 100 million rupiah in small loans in West Sumatra's Tanah Datar district was timed to coincide with a major Golkar rally led by its chairman Akbar Tanjung.

Despite its control of a huge apparatus and funds, the Golkar leadership is deeply concerned at its close identification with the Suharto junta and the low level of public support. In the past, Golkar gained between 70 and 80 percent of the vote in elections that permitted only two other state-controlled opposition parties—the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) and the United

Development Party (PPP).

Golkar Deputy Chairman Marzuki Darusman, who is also head of its parliamentary wing, has publicly criticised the party for choosing Habibie as its presidential candidate, claiming that he was too closely connected to Suharto. The entire party, however, is the creation of the military dictatorship that emerged from CIA-organised 1965-66 coup which ousted former president Sukarno and resulted in the genocide of at least half a million workers, peasants and supporters of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI).

Whatever their political differences, Golkar and the opposition parties all seek to preserve the "status quo" and the state apparatus which was shaken up by the forced resignation of Suharto last year. The three opposition leaders expressed the hope in their joint statement that "the election [will] bear fruit in the form of a legitimate and respectable government in both the public as well as the international view". That is exactly the outcome being sought by the ruling class in order to press ahead with the program of economic restructuring and austerity measures demanded by the IMF. All the major parties are pledged to carrying that out.



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