

Former separatist wins governorship in Indonesian province of Aceh

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Elections for governor and officials in 21 local districts in Indonesia's province of Aceh have resulted in victories for candidates associated with the former separatist Free Aceh Movement (GAM). The poll was part of a deal, brokered in the wake of the December 2004 tsunami that devastated the province, to end three decades of fighting and bring GAM into the political mainstream.

The results of the December 11 poll, officially confirmed last week, gave the posts of governor and deputy governor to Irwandi Yusuf and his running mate Mohammad Nazar. Yusuf and Nazar received 38 percent of the vote—well above the 25 percent threshold needed to win in the first round. The team decisively defeated their nearest rivals—Ahmad Humam Hamid and Hasbi Abdullah—who were chosen by the older, exile GAM leadership based in Sweden. Hamid and Abdullah received 16.7 percent of the vote.

Yusuf, who trained in veterinary science, was GAM's military spokesman in Aceh. Nazar has been prominent in the campaign for a referendum to decide on Acehnese independence. Their last minute decision to run reflected widespread disaffection among former GAM fighters with the exile leadership. Hamid and Abdullah, regarded as more moderate, also had the backing of conservative Islamic Jakarta-based party—the United Development Party (PPP).

While painted as a radical by the media, Yusuf quickly made clear he would abide by the terms of the agreement struck in Helsinki in August 2005 between the Indonesian government and GAM leaders. Under the deal, GAM agreed to a ceasefire, pledged to disarm its fighters and formally renounced its demand for an independent Aceh. In return, Jakarta withdrew 20,000 of the 50,000 troops stationed in the province, agreed to elections and made vaguely worded promises on provincial autonomy.

Yusuf was one of the GAM negotiators and presided over the disarming of its fighters. Following the poll, he

told the official Antara newsagency: “We will ask the central government to help us in implementing the Helsinki agreement.” Speaking to Reuters, he distanced himself from protesters calling for the UN-backed Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) to remain in Aceh after the election, saying, “the political will of the [Jakarta] government has been quite good”.

The election outcome shocked the Indonesian government, which clearly expected a closer vote and a second round run-off. However, the overwhelming support for candidates associated with GAM reflects the deep-seated hostility of the local population to the brutal methods of successive Indonesian regimes. Three decades of fighting and military repression resulted in more than 15,000 deaths and widespread poverty in a province with significant oil and gas resources.

Another team of Malik Raden and Sayed Faudi Zakaria ran a distant third with 14 percent of the vote, despite the backing of major Indonesian parties. The slate was put forward by Golkar, the country's largest party and the ruling party under the Suharto dictatorship. But it also had the backing of Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's Democratic Party and the main opposition party—the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P) of former president Megawati Sukarnoputri.

Jakarta's initial response to Yusuf's victory has been muted. Defence Minister Juwano Sudarsono described the outcome as “an expression of a desire for autonomy by the Acehnese. The message is that the central government must be more attentive to the Aceh people.” Muladi, a senior Golkar figure connected to a military thinktank, called for special attention to be paid to Aceh. He warned that GAM had to dissolve itself or Jakarta would consider it was abandoning the Helsinki agreement.

There have been no alarmist denunciations of Yusuf, however. The Yudhoyono regime has obviously calculated that the GAM leadership can be used to

stabilise the province amid the widespread devastation and social hardship caused by the tsunami. At the same time, the Helsinki agreement was carefully tailored so as not to encourage separatist movements in other parts of Indonesia, such as Papua.

For its part, GAM is treading a well-worn path marked out by other national liberation movements—trading its guns for a place in the political establishment. GAM, which was formed in 1976, has always represented sections of the Acehnese elite disgruntled at Jakarta's exploitation of the province's resources. A key element of the Helsinki agreement is to increase the province's share of oil and gas revenues to 55 percent and 40 percent respectively. The provincial budget of \$US3.1 billion will be five times more than the 1999 level.

Elections for the provincial assembly are due in 2009. While candidates associated with GAM had to stand as independents in last month's election, GAM is seeking to establish itself as an official political party. The Yudhoyono government has promised to change Indonesia's electoral regulations, which at present require recognised parties to have a base throughout the country. The convoluted new regulations will make an exception for Aceh, but bar candidates from Acehnese parties from standing in national elections unless they resign and obtain the endorsement of a national party.

President Yudhoyono and the Indonesian armed forces, which still have a sizeable presence in the province, will undoubtedly be watching the actions of the new Acehnese governor very closely. At the same time, the installation of GAM leaders will provide a welcome political safety valve for the groundswell of anger that has developed over the inadequate tsunami relief and reconstruction effort.

The 2004 tsunami was a terrible tragedy for the local population. The UN estimates that the huge waves destroyed 97 percent of annual economic production in and around Aceh. The tsunami claimed at least 167,000 lives and left hundreds of thousands homeless. Some 1.3 million homes and dwellings were destroyed, along with 85 percent of clean water supplies, 92 percent of sanitation facilities and most transport and energy infrastructure.

Two years after the tsunami, 50,000 people are still living in temporary barrack-style accommodation with inadequate facilities. The official reconstruction agency, known as BBR, set up by the Yudhoyono administration has been repeatedly accused of incompetence and corruption. According to the World Bank, of the \$US5.5

billion funds promised to local and international donors, only \$US2.2 billion has been dispersed.

As of November, just 58,269 of the desperately-needed 130,000 new houses had been completed. One non-government organisation—the Aceh-based Anti-Corruption Movement—was reported on the *Asia News* website as saying that between 30 and 40 percent of all relief funding “has been tainted by graft”. The organisation denounced the exorbitant salaries paid to BRR executives as “another form of legalised theft”.

Of the dwellings that have been built, many are substandard. According to a *Christian Science Monitor* article, “several international agencies—Oxfam, Care and Save the Children among them—have had to tear down substandard houses this year, while others have struggled to award contracts.” A survey conducted by United Nations-Habitat and Universitas Syiah Kuala last year found that a quarter of the 50,000 homes built for tsunami victims were of poor quality and 5,000 would have to be rebuilt.

Tensions have emerged between coastal dwellers hit by the tsunami and those from highland villages who were displaced by the protracted civil war. While limited assistance is being provided to tsunami victims, those left homeless by the fighting have received little or no help. A survey by the World Bank and Indonesia's Ministry of Home Affairs found that 82 percent of tsunami survivors had returned home, as compared to just 65 percent of those displaced by the war.

Unemployment is estimated at 50 percent throughout the province, but the figure is even higher for demobilised GAM fighters. Few have received the \$3,000 grant promised by the Indonesian government to help them to resettle. Rajali, a former field commander who attended a rally for Irwandi Yusuf last month, told the media that he and his 150 men had not received a cent. GAM supporter Nurhayati told the *Jakarta Post* after the poll: “We support his [Yusuf's] election, but he must provide us with houses and jobs.”

Commenting on the growing social and political tensions, a foreign observer told the *Christian Science Monitor*: “We had a year honeymoon [after the peace deal], but this is a time bomb.”



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