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THE REGION

West Papua in the balance

CLINTON FERNANDES
reviews Papua's recent
history.

Soon after the Indonesian military retreated from East Timor in 1999, veteran Indonesian political analyst Dr Soedjati Djiwandono asked whether his country ought to 'split peacefully into two, three, four or even five smaller nation-states with a greater chance and hope for peace, greater prosperity, equality and justice for all?'¹ Most Australians agree with him; a survey of public opinion carried out by Newspoll on 7-9 April 2006 found that more than 75% of Australians supported the right of Papuans to self-determination even if that meant independence from Indonesia.

The political status of Papua had remained unresolved in 1949 when the Dutch transferred sovereignty over the rest of the East Indies to Indonesia. It finally became part of Indonesia twenty years later during the so-called

Act of Free Choice. However, most Papuans today refer to it as the Act of No Choice; the Indonesian military handpicked 1,022 Papuans, representing less than 1% of the population. With no international scrutiny, it was little wonder that every single one of them agreed to join Indonesia. In an interview many years later, the UN's Under-Secretary for the Act of Free Choice conceded that the Act 'was just a whitewash. The mood at the United Nations was to get rid of this problem as quickly as possible... Nobody gave a thought to the fact that there were a million people who had their fundamental rights trampled'.²

Papua was transformed under Indonesian rule, most noticeably in the demographic sphere. In 1971 migrants to Papuans accounted for only around 4% of the total population; thirty years later their share is estimated to have reached 35%. As most migrants live in urban areas, they constitute approximately 66% of the total urban population. In fast-growing cities along the north coast, the percentage of migrants is even higher – around 70% of the total population³. There have been two kinds of migrants: 'transmigrants' who arrived as part of a government-funded resettlement program and 'spontaneous' migrants who organised their own move. Transmigration was motivated in part by fears of a population explosion on Java, although it had very little effect in reducing the population there. Instead, it displaced and diluted communities elsewhere in the archipelago. According to Riwanto Tirtosudarmono, senior researcher at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, transmigration closely connected to notions of national harmony; it was intended to accelerate the process of national integration and ultimately lead to cultural homogeneity. A former chief of the armed forces General Benny Murdani explicitly linked transmigration to national security, arguing that the military should be involved in selecting transmigration sites.⁴ Nearly a quarter of a million people were

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brought to Papua under the transmigration program.

More than double that number came to Papua using their own resources. Known as 'spontaneous migrants', they altered the province's character in far-reaching ways. Many came from the southern parts of Sulawesi. South Sulawesi's harbour of Ujung Pandang is the third largest Indonesian seaport after Jakarta and Surabaya. Its central location combined with its peoples' migrating behaviour has given it an important role in the economic and political development of eastern Indonesia. These migrants (the Bugis, the Makassarese and the Butonese, known collectively as BBM) were notorious for their aggressive trading, close social organisation and unwillingness to assimilate to Papuan culture. The Indonesian intellectual Dr. George Aditjondro has provided a vivid

description of how the BBM have fuelled resentment among local Papuans. His paper's title puts it well: 'They Come by Boat, Sleep in the Marketplace, Shit in the River and Go Home by Plane'¹⁵.

Despite the hopes of Indonesia's military and economic planners, the effect of the new migrants was not to instill a feeling of Indonesian-ness among Papua's indigenous population. Quite the opposite, in fact; the phenomenon of mass migration and the stiff competition they faced from skilled and unskilled immigrant labour meant that their own ability to engage in private sector activities grew increasingly limited. They began to resent the new arrivals and develop a sense of shared Papuan victimhood. Eventually they began to form a pan-Papuan political identity.

Nine months after President Suharto resigned in May 1998, a delegation of civil society leaders representing a cross-section of Papuan society travelled to Jakarta to meet Suharto's successor, President Habibie. The 'Team of 100' as they called themselves comprised intellectuals, former political prisoners, Papuan Muslims, students and members of the provincial legislative assembly. They informed Habibie matter-of-factly that they wanted independence from Indonesia. According to reliable accounts of the meeting, Habibie responded with stunned silence. Clearly unprepared for their demand, he appealed to the Papuan delegation to reconsider. The meeting ended inconclusively, but both sides learnt something from it. The national authorities decided that something had to be done to contain the new challenge to Indonesian territorial integrity. The Papuan delegation went back and commenced preparations for a national consultation known as *Mubes* (*musyawarah besar*, or 'grand gathering for discussion') on the causes of the conflict with a view to developing strategies for freedom.

Before the end of the year, of



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course, Habibie would no longer be president. His successor Abdurrahman Wahid had spent New Year's Eve in Papua, celebrating the first local sunrise of the new millennium. Wahid agreed that the province should be officially known as Papua rather than Irian Jaya. He also promised that Papua (and Aceh) would be granted extensive autonomy within Indonesia. It was during this time of openness, known as Papuan Spring, that the *Mubes* was held from 23-26 February 2000. Attended by thousands of Papuans from all over the territory, the *mubes* addressed three main issues: the imperative to address the injustice of Papua's history (*pelurusan sejarah*, or 'the need to rectify history'), the development of a coordinated political approach, and the need to consolidate the groundswell of the developing movement. It was also

decided that a People's Congress should be organised. Abdurrahman Wahid stepped in once again, making a generous donation to the Congress, as did the Freeport mining company. In its final resolution, the Congress stated that the Papuans were already a sovereign nation and that Indonesia, the Netherlands, the US and the United Nations should acknowledge their political rights and sovereignty. The Congress also decided to establish its own executive known as the Papua Presidium Council (*Presidium Dewan Papua* or PDP). Theys Eluay was elected Chairperson and Tom Beanal Vice-Chairperson.

The Indonesian military had rather different ideas; a leaked operational plan dated 8 June 2000 showed that they intended to decapitate the Papuan leadership, commence military operations to eliminate armed resistance,

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establish pro-Indonesian militias to intimidate civil society groups and improve social welfare. Accordingly, the chair of the PDP Theys Eluay was strangled to death and five PDP leaders were imprisoned. The chief of the army would refer to his killers as 'heroes because the person they killed was a rebel leader'. The next month, Indonesia's president instructed the military leadership to 'execute your assignments and responsibilities to your best ability without constantly experiencing anxiety about violating principles of human rights'.

Extrémist Muslim groups such as Laskar Jihad began to enter Papua. It had the backing of military and political hardliners who wished to destabilise President Abdurrahman Wahid's reformist administration. Unlike other violent Islamic

groups, which operated in a clandestine manner, Laskar Jihad revelled in shows of strength, such as rallies, demonstrations, parades and processions. Its members received military training near Bogor (West Java) and Yogyakarta from sympathetic members of the Indonesian military. In particular, training near Bogor in April 2000 was undertaken by officer cadets, members of the Army's Special Forces (Kopassus) and martial arts trainers. In 2003 Eurico Guterres, the notorious militia figurehead from East Timor, arrived in Timika to establish the *Front Pembela Merah Putih* or Red and White Defenders' Front (red and white are the colours of the Indonesian flag). Their presence increased the levels of tension among the locals.

As a sop to Papuan opinion, the Indonesian authorities also offered Special Autonomy for the province. Although it had also been proposed for Aceh, Papuan moderates seized on the offer and drafted a Special Autonomy bill (*Otsus* or *Otonomi Khusus*) that reflected their basic requirements. They asked for a greater share of revenues from resource extraction projects (70% of oil and gas and 80% of mining). Funds would be allocated over a 20-year period towards health, education and infrastructure that benefits rural communities. Papuans would be represented in an upper house – the Papuan People's Assembly (*MRP* or *Majelis Rakyat Papua*) – which would uphold indigenous interests. Any administrative division of Papua would have to be deliberated by the MRP and approved by the provincial parliament. Migration to Papua would be guided, supervised and controlled by the provincial government. It was, in short, an excellent opportunity for the Indonesian authorities to demonstrate trust and resolve matters.

The involvement of Papuan representatives was a sign that negotiations between the central government and the Papuan people were possible. But disillusionment set in when it became clear that the central government was

opposed to the establishment of the MRP; the Minister for Home Affairs Hari Sabarno insisted that cultural, not political, values would be represented. The central government was clearly in no mood to compromise. Wahid's successor Megawati Sukarnoputri signed a presidential instruction on 27 January 2003 creating two new provinces, three new regencies and one municipality. The presidential instruction was presented as a 'blossoming' (*pemekaran*) rather than what most observers reckoned was a 'partitioning'. The current president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was Security Minister at the time. It appears that he was not consulted before the announcement. His election in October 2004 once again renewed hopes (within Australia's foreign policy community, not in Papua) that Special Autonomy would be implemented and that political rather than military solutions will be found. Yudhoyono did in fact establish the MRP, but ensured it retained few of its originally envisaged powers.

Papuans responded to these developments in a number of ways, but perhaps their most important response has gone unnoticed by many observers: on 1 December 2005 a coalition of 18 Papuan groups came together to form the West Papua National Council for Liberation (WPNCL), a coordinating body that unites armed guerrillas with political leaders and civil society groups. If the unity of the Council holds, and that is by no means assured, it will be for the first time in four decades. A key demand for Papuans has been *merdeka*, commonly understood by outsiders to mean an independent state. But a less publicised point of view has it that not all Papuans necessarily support the idea of outright independence. *Merdeka* probably has a number of meanings.⁶ One meaning is almost certainly what anthropologist Brigham Golden describes as a Papuan liberation theology – a 'moral crusade for peace and justice on earth'. The word may have a much more profound meaning for ethnic

Papuans than independence. According to Golden, 'the term ... holds a sublime – almost spiritual – significance for ethnic Papuans. Indeed, asking a Papuan about the meaning of *merdeka* is likely to provoke the florid language and the far away gaze of a utopian vision. Transcending a nationalist aspiration in the modern sense, *merdeka* is a far more profound vision of worldly emancipation: from injustice, violence, subjugation, destitution, racial discrimination – even from an unfortunate shame that many seem to feel regarding their own "primitive" past'.⁷ Understood in this sense, *merdeka* and independence/Special Autonomy are most certainly not mutually exclusive.

Of course, a proper resolution requires political will on the part of the Indonesian government. But a major obstacle is the power of the Indonesian military, which prevents a genuine discussion among all Papuans. Yet Australian foreign policy operates in solidarity with this entity, arguing that closer ties with it are in Australia's national interest. Yet few institutions are so loathed and feared across the Indonesian archipelago. Its diplomatic isolation, rather than encouragement, may be in the interests of the Indonesian and Australian people.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Jakarta Post 9 November 1999, *Time to face up to changing times*.
2. S. Lekic, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 Nov 2001.
3. B. Resosudarmo, L. Napitupulu, C. Manning and V. Wanggai, *Challenges for economic development in an era of political and economic change in Papua*, unpublished paper dated 8 April 2006 provided to me by Dr. Budy Resosudarmo.
4. 'Population Mobility and Social Conflict' in *The Indonesian Crisis: A human development perspective*, ISEAS 2003.
5. *Datang dengan Kapal, Tidur di Pasar, Buang Air di Kali, Pulang Naik Pesawat*, YPMD, Jayapura, 1986.
6. I say 'probably' because the Indonesian military prohibits a proper analysis or discussion of what Papuans want.
7. B. Golden 2003, *Political Millenarianism and the Economy of Conflict*, The Asia Society.

FOREIGN POLICY

When is hypocrisy 'good governance'?

ADAM HUGHES HENRY offers a critique of Australia's foreign policy in our region.

In the bluntest of diplomatic language Howard blamed the civil unrest in East Timor on bad governance and presumably corruption.¹ Alexander Downer made a call to investigate claims that Timorese PM Mari Alkatiri allegedly plotted to assassinate political rivals.²

Following the arrival of 43 West Papuans in Australia there was a nationalistic Javanese campaign of immature diplomatic threat that saw the recalling of Indonesia's ambassador and even the public naming of Australian citizens as agents of Papuan separatism.³ In the short term it has achieved the desired result, i.e. Prime Minister Howard's controversial legislation amendments to process all refugee boat arrivals offshore.⁴ Armed with the BIN list of Australian citizens an Indonesian political delegation

visited Canberra to demand that 42 West Papuans be stripped of their temporary protection visas. Immigration Minister Senator Vanstone, who met with the delegation on the 13 June 2006, assured them that a review was underway.⁵

The ethical condemnation of the government of East Timor, the newest and one of the poorest nations on earth, by Howard should be cause for serious reflection and analysis. The Defence Signals Directorate (DSD) was aware prior to the 1999 ballot that the Pro-Integrationist Militias were nothing more than proxies of the TNI (Indonesian Army).⁶ The Howard government also refused to accept US assessments that UN peacekeepers would be required to protect the 1999 UN-operated independence ballot from potential chaos.⁷ Having >