

A Preview of the Indonesian Elections 1999¹

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- ❑ Having experienced an authoritarian regime led by President Soeharto for about three decades and witnessed his disgraceful resignation, the Indonesian society is now witnessing the proliferation of political parties. More than 140 parties announced to have been formed last year. After the verification process was conducted by Team of Eleven, in early 1999, only 48 parties are eligible to run in the upcoming parliamentary elections (3 old parties and 45 new).
- ❑ This political liberalization is a consequence and a beginning of democratic transition that pro-democracy activists have been struggling for. As far as the Nation's Awakening Party (PKB, *Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*) is concerned, such liberalization is seen as an outcome of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) participation in the development of democratic awareness and the empowerment of civil society. Some indicators: NU's principles of living in a plural society and an open world (*tri ukhuwwah* or 'three brotherhoods', 1985), Gus Dur and Forum Democracy (1995), NU revived an Islamic perspective on basic necessities and human rights (1994, 1997), NU's view on women and political leadership in Islam (NU 1997, PKB 1999), etc. (see A. Schwarz 1993, Van Bruinessen 1994, D. Dhakidae 1994, DE Ramage 1996, or A. Feillard 1999 for analysis of NU's involvement in these areas).
- ❑ An outlook of PKB (different from and not to be conflated with NU; PKB's platform partly adopts NU's views). What is PKB's chance in the June 7th elections? Possible or even necessary political alliance, especially for the presidential election in November 1999, as hardly any single party will become a majority force; or else, each candidate from the big five or seven will become a dark horse and therefore a gridlock has the chance to occur.
- ❑ More important issues: fairness in elections, the validity of election results, the formation of new government (or regime) which is democratic (i.e. democratic installation), the emergence of political stability as a necessary environment for post-crisis Indonesia. We are not in the phase of deepening democracy, let alone democratic consolidation. Therefore democratic installation resulted from the upcoming elections will play crucial role in facilitating and enhancing political stability in the country and the region. Only then will we (Indonesians) be able to comfortably formulate policies and decide steps for economic recovery.
- ❑ Post-crisis economic recovery should adopt profit-making measures that are bound to the market. This necessitates efforts to maximize access to international trade and capital market. Economic policies should also emphasize growth and equity and be oriented to address the interest of the majority of the population
- ❑ A special issue of national reconciliation will have to be addressed and proceeded in order to heal and 're-unite' the nation. Thus I put the issue of nationalism (manifested in compromise and reconciliation), pluralism and democratization on a parallel level. Political transition in Indonesia consists of multiple agenda.
- ❑ NU's immediate task in relation with PKB: Reemphasizing NU's involvement in the empowerment of civil society for the future development of democracy. Democracy requires not only legitimate, credible and efficient government, but also an independent and strong civil society, which is at the same time prosperous.

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