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Towards Democracy

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Preface

"In a polling station in Bandung, West Java, election officials wore the *Cheong Sam*, Chinese dress. In Jakarta, officials in a number of polling stations donned the indigenous *Betawi* attire. In Bali, like in previous elections, officials held traditional rituals and dressed in the famous outfits." On the whole, however, the election officials all over the country wore casual dress. The few quoted cases, however, did reflect the situation when the decisive Presidential election was held. It was a very peaceful election and even "in the war-torn provinces, such as Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam and Papua, no clashes were reported in an election earlier called one of the most complex in the world." (*Jakarta Post*, 21 September 2004).

How would future historians describe Indonesia of the year 2004? Would they call it "the year of the reconfirmation of re-emergence of democratic tradition" or "the most politicized year in contemporary history" or "the year of political promises" or, perhaps, who knows, "the year of the crisis of the political elites"? Since the tsunami had caused such disastrous damage to nature and human lives in Aceh and Nias, would the year be remembered as "the year of natural disasters?" Whatever future historians may call it, the year 2004 is symbolically and indeed, also historically, very significant for the nation-state that has from the beginning of the process of its nation formation called itself "Indonesia". For the first time in history the majority of the Indonesian voters — around 80 per cent — for three consecutive times willingly went to the polling stations. On 5 April, they went to the polling stations to cast their votes to elect the members of four legislative bodies — the national, provincial, and district legislative bodies and the newly instituted "council of regional representatives". On 5 July, they went again to the polling booths to elect the President and the

Vice-President. There were five pairs of candidates competing for the highest offices in the country. Since no pair received more than 50 per cent of the popular votes, on 20 September, the second round of the presidential election was held. In spite of the fact that the three biggest parties that emerged after the April general election supported the incumbent President, Megawati Sukarnoputri, slightly more than 60 per cent of the voters elected the former Coordinating Minister for Political and Defence Affairs, General (retired) Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and his running mate, the former Coordinating Minister for Social Affairs, Mohammad Jusuf Kalla, as the next President and Vice-President. When, on 20 October, the first directly elected President and Vice-President were sworn in, Indonesia had entered a new phase of its political history. Six years after Soeharto stepped down as the President, the People's Consultative Assembly, Indonesia's highest political body, installed the sixth President of the Republic of Indonesia. It was, however, the fourth President after the fall of Soeharto who was the second President of the Republic.

When Soeharto stepped down as President, he not only left behind the Presidential palace, but also a deeply wounded nation, a shaky government, and a state threatened by a number of disintegrative forces. The fall of Soeharto was also the beginning of the period of uncertainties. That was the time when Indonesia experienced the most crowded events in its contemporary history. It was the time when every day and hour seemed to mean something, as if no chain of events would simply disappear into the waste-basket of history. What would happen next? In which direction would this or that event lead? In this situation, the voices of *reformasi*, "political reformation", that aimed at laying a new foundation for the future of Indonesia had to compete with the more pressing political challenges of the present and the re-emergence of the demands of the past. Without properly knocking on the doors of the present, the voices and deeds of revenge came to the surface here and there, sometimes in their ugliest form. Had the vastly growing number of the politically conscious public forgotten the ideals of the *reformasi* — the desired ideals that hastened the fall of Suharto, who had only a few months earlier won the biggest victory ever?

In this sphere of crowded events the so-called political elite, the persons who were once referred to as *pemimpin rakyat*, "the leaders of the people", found themselves in a crisis of mutual trust. No one seemed to have political and, indeed even moral trust in anyone. Once the authoritarian shield had been lifted, the carefully covered divergent types of differences seemed to emerge instantly. Suddenly Indonesia had become the country populated by the communities that were strangers to each other. With the continuing mutual mistrust among the elite, crisis in the ability to manage crisis was inevitable. The once relatively well-run bureaucratic authoritarian state seemed to have transformed itself into a "messy state". In the meantime, the demands for reformation continued to be everybody's claim to the assumed vacant legitimacy. In this situation, the so-called *KKN* or CCN — corruption, collusion, and nepotism — and the authoritarian political system became the symbols of the root of all the social and political evils of Suharto's New Order regime. But then a series of questions had to be asked. How could the principles of the rule of law be applied? In what way could the authoritarian and centralized political system that had been deeply entrenched in the structure of consciousness be transformed into a democratic one without creating any serious disturbances? That was the time when even the viability of the existing system of the state itself came under intense scrutiny. In the meantime, the price of having lived under the authoritarian system had to be paid now that the system itself had been rejected. A "new Indonesia" had to be created. Or perhaps the process of the "remaking of Indonesia", as a number of intellectuals had been saying, had to be started. What future lay ahead for Indonesia? How many hopes had been nurtured? How many disappointments had to be endured? Perhaps the year 2004 that had pointed the way to some kind of political maturity was the beginning of the real future. Yet who knew?

When Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and his running mate, Jusuf Kalla, were elected to the highest offices of the country, fifty-nine years had passed since Sukarno and Hatta, Indonesia's first President and Vice-President who were strongly endorsed and supported by the patriotic youth, took the most daring step of proclaiming the independence of Indonesia on 17 August 1945. In a very short and rather terse statement, the

two most prominent leaders of the independence movement had established a clearly defined boundary of history, which though still not, perhaps, a historical reality, was definitely in the structure of consciousness. It took about four-and-a-half years of armed and diplomatic struggle before the world recognized the sovereignty of the new nation-state. When finally on 27 December 1949, the Red and White flag was hoisted in front of the official residence of the former Governor General of the Netherlands Indies, it signified not only the victory of a struggling nation but also that of an idea — an idea that had from the beginning of the process of nation formation served as the most important unifying element. "What is the use of independence," Sukarno rhetorically asked during the time when the newly proclaimed nation-state was still struggling for its existence "if we don't have democracy?" Was it not this idea that had sown the seeds of mutual trust and indeed, unity, among the "representatives" of the many ethnic groups when they met in the urban sphere of the colonial setting? It is not without a strong historical foundation that the so-called "Day of the Youth Oath" has been taken as one of the most important milestones in the history of nation formation. That was the time — on 28 October 1928 — when the leaders of the organizations of the educated youth ended their Youth Congress with an oath, which stated that they belonged to "one nation — Indonesia; one homeland — Indonesia" and recognized and honoured "one language of unity — the Indonesian language". It symbolically states that Indonesia is a nation that was created by a consciously made common agreement.

This book is an attempt to tell the story of a nation in the making. It traces the beginning of the process of nation-formation, the struggle for independence, the hopeful beginning of the new nation-state of Indonesia only to be followed by hard and difficult ways to remain true to the ideals of independence. In the process, Indonesia with its sprawling archipelago and its multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition has to undergo various types of crises and internal conflicts, but the ideals that have been nurtured since the beginning when the new nation began to be visualized remain intact. Some changes in the interpretation may have taken place and some deviations here and there can be seen, but the literal meaning of the ideals

continues to be the guiding light. In short, this is a history of a nation and its continuing efforts to retain the ideals of its existence.

The book would have not been written without the persistent persuasion of Professor Wang Gangwu. "How would the historian tell the process of nation-building?" he asked rhetorically. He then invited me and my friends from Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines, and Malaysia, to venture into the area that we sometimes considered the domain of the political scientists and sociologists. The past is indeed the field of study in which the historian may feel at ease, while the present may seem to him a strange world of crowded and unrelated events. But then how can one deny the simple fact that although the historian studies the past — or more likely the distant past — he does not live in the past? The historian has no other choice but to face the fact that he is a member of present-day society. The moment he decides to study the historical dynamics of the present, he soon realizes that he is dealing with what can neither be treated as "something out there" nor "the other". The history he relates therefore cannot be simply seen as the reconstruction of past events — or a story of a "foreign country", as one historian describes history — but also as a way of saying something about something. In spite of the uncompromising attachment to the notion of truth, without which one must admit, no history has the right to exist, the reconstruction of past events is also a form of intellectual discourse.

It took a long time before this book could be completed. The project of writing the book had to compete with so many other commitments. Without the generosity, support and the congenial environment at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), I would never have had the courage to visualize the time when the book could be completed. Without the able editorialship of Mrs Triena Ong and her staff the manuscript I produced might well have been unreadable. In the process of writing I benefitted immensely from the series of internal discussions we — the five historians from Southeast Asian countries — conducted under the chairmanship of Professor Wang Gungwu. Although Rey Ileto, Cheah Boon Keng, Edwin Lee, and Charnvit Kasetsiri would talk about the experiences of their respective countries, their ideas and historical interpretations had unfailingly enriched my understanding of my own country. I must also

express my gratitude to Tony Reid and Djoko Suryo who commented on the draft of a few chapters I managed to finish at the seminar held in September 2002 at ISEAS.

A substantial portion of this book is based on number of writings, which cannot be all registered in the bibliography, I wrote since the time I was still a struggling graduate student till the time I ventured to write this book. In the process I have benefited from the criticisms and comments from my teachers and friends. Whatever the merit of this book may be, I would like to use this occasion to express my grateful feeling and appreciation to my late teachers and friends, Oliver Wolters, L. Sharp, George Kahin, Claire Holt, Clifford Geertz, Onghokham, Selo Soemardjan, Koentjaraningrat, Sitti Baroroh Baued, Harsya W. Bachtiar, Alfian, Soedjatmoko, Abdurrahman Surjomihardjo, T. Ibrahim Alfian, and Sartono Kartidirdjo. I would like to say "thank you" to my teachers and friends, Ben Anderson, James Siegel, Adrian Lapian, and Thee Kian Wie. Although it is impossible for me to register their names, I am also grateful to the comments and criticisms or even questions put forwards by the so many participants in a number seminars and workshops on the papers I happened to present. The Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI — Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia) was kind enough to permit me to work on this book to the extent of allowing me leave from the office several times, even during the time I served as its chairman. This book can be taken as my way of expressing both my gratitude and apologies to LIPI.

This book is dedicated to the mother of my children — my beloved wife, Ida.

Taufik Abdullah

Introduction

Wang Gungwu

Indonesia

From the moment we began talking about nation-building in Southeast Asia, we all knew that Indonesia's story will be special and that Taufik Abdullah would have the toughest assignment in order to do that subject justice. This is not only because Indonesia covers the most land and water and has the largest population in the region, not even because it has the largest number of different *sukubangsa* (ethnic groups) each with its own ruling elites. It was also because the forces that projected a revolutionary ideal of nationhood also rejected the promise of order and stability offered by colonial state structures and insisted on providing the new republic with their own founding myths. Thus, although the origins of the Indonesian ideal may be dated half a century before 1945, the nation remained for a long time an indistinct word-image and, until after the Second World War, consisted only of a few bright outlines of future unity in the minds of a small intelligentsia.

The image was brought to life between 1945 and 1950 through proclamations of independence and the bloodshed that came from a series of revolutionary actions. These together served as the country's inspiration for Indonesia's first decade. Nevertheless, underlying the call for a people's revolution was the idea of a democratic modernity. The *Angkatan '45* (Generation of 1945) that drew the first blueprint of nationhood had no doubts that the country would build the nation through democratic means. What had eluded them was the nature of democracy, something that had never been practiced when their lands were under Dutch or Japanese rule. It was also something that the military leaders who fought for their freedom were prepared ultimately to leave to the civilian leaders to define.

As it turned out, the first decade of experimentation ended in disarray and the country's first President, Sukarno, intervened with his idea of guided democracy. It was a fateful decision. Although he was unable to carry through his particular vision of presidential rule, he left that legacy for his successor. When the aborted Gestapu coup of 1965 brought about his downfall, it did not free the country from the "guided" structure of power that Sukarno had initiated. In the name of *pancasila* democracy, the second President, Suharto, using a different coalition that consisted representatives mainly of the military and the bureaucracy, came to dominate the country for the next forty years.

Suharto's long tenure at the head of the government achieved many things for Indonesia. It brought sustained economic growth for the country and successfully developed large parts of the country that had been neglected in the past. It also set about to forge an integrated national identity and was even prepared to use force to achieve that. It may be too early to assess whether that process of integration will continue and may eventually succeed. What is clear is that many sectors of government became corrupt and dysfunctional and that this was largely due to the lack of democratic institutions that could check the system's excesses. In the end, the regime failed to respond to the growing discontent among its people, and the Asian financial crisis of 1997–98 brought it quickly to an end. Once again, Indonesia returned to democracy. For the past ten years, the governments of four presidents have seized the opportunity to make a fresh start. They have shown great determination to create new institutions that would best suit the conditions of their country.

Taufik Abdullah believes that nation-building in Indonesia was, from the start, rooted in the democratic ideals held by some of the country's best and brightest, and that the ideals were deeply held. That first generation overcame all efforts to dilute these ideals by the returning Dutch and their local allies. There were, after all, no precedents for ideals that promise to take a conglomeration of loosely governed indigenous states, with scores of cultural, religious and political organisations, and hundreds of languages and traditional systems, and weld them together to become the foundations of a new nation. As it turned out, the very boldness of the ideals transcended all calculations of mundane plots and stratagems. Above all, the high-flown

words and charismatic personality of its first President, Sukarno, implanted the dream of unity into the minds of a whole generation of young men and women. For all his faults and in spite of the many doubts and distractions that followed his rule, few can deny that he always spoke persuasively for an historic nationhood and did more than anyone to give substance to the hopes of millions of scattered peoples.

But it is a great challenge to describe how that dream materialized over that last sixty years. I can think of no better person to do this than Taufik Abdullah. As a young man, he saw how it all began in the columns of transient newspapers and magazines, the sharp discussions in Central Sumatra, the fierce debates in Jakarta, Jogjakarta and Surabaya, and the alternative visions in the mosques and churches of the lesser islands. He cannot suppress his excitement even today when he recalls the sustained efforts by so many to try to shape the nation from cultures, languages and interests that had never been placed so intimately together in the past. It is the wonder he experienced that led him to find the key to the country's revolutionary beginnings. By travelling around every part of the country as he has done, he has been able to trace the roots of the original ideal to the inchoate wishes of thousands of ordinary people who looked for ways to contribute to the final shape of the country, something they could identify with and really call their own. The urge for democracy in some form or other has, therefore, always run deep in their hearts and, as he sees it, still does.

In their innocence, many people thought for a while that one man could symbolize everything they wanted and they were willing to let him design that country for them. Only too late did they discover that no one person could ever represent that future. Sukarno not only failed them himself, but also left them without the institutions that would give others a chance to do better. His successor President Suharto continued to provide a lofty view from on high and went on denying younger generations of Indonesians any hope for direct involvement in the country's recovery from the disasters of 1956–65.

Nevertheless, democracy aside, the oneness of Indonesia that its people have a sacred duty to protect was established. Suharto gave the country what it never had in its first decade and a half; he gave them the economic

base that secured the fundamentals for the people's well being. In addition, he implemented what Sukarno had initiated, the primary need for a national language that would be used in education and the media and also reach every home in the country. For over thirty years, he balanced the contending forces in the country, allowing a few to be very rich, many to be upwardly mobile while leaving much of the growing populace to struggle for their livelihood. By sharing some power with the armed forces and embracing the capitalist system, he brought significant progress to Indonesia. Now another generation has to take it from there and, with a renewed faith in democracy, has embarked on another path towards the nation-building task that is yet to be completed.

Today, Indonesia's commitment to democracy is firm. It has reached the point when the initiative to host the Bali Democracy Forum in December 2008 seems natural and obvious. How the country got there is the story that Taufik tells as testimony of how a possible dream could be turned into reality. He asks us to look at the record of what people did or tried to do during the past century to build a multi-layered but integral nation. He underlines the wish among peoples across thousands of islands and centuries of distinct traditions to do so by democratic means. He does this to help us see whether the goal of modernity that was promised the Indonesian people can now be fulfilled.

The Series

This volume is the fourth in the series about nation-building histories in Southeast Asia. It had its beginnings in Bangkok at the 14th Conference of the International Association of the Historians of Asia (IAHA) in 1996. At that meeting, I noted that nation-building in Southeast Asia began fifty years ago and suggested that it was time for historians to write about that phenomenon. Most books on the region's new nations have been written by journalists and social scientists. I asked whether historians would tell the story differently. Decades of anti-colonial nationalism came to a climax with the Japanese invasion of 1941–45. New states like those of the Philippines, Indonesia and Burma were born immediately after the war, followed soon by those of Malaysia and Singapore. The independence of a unified Vietnam

was delayed by a bitter war and this held back the liberation of the two other Indochina states, Cambodia and Laos, but the independence of all three was only a matter of time.

Many of the protagonists of the early phases of nation-building have described their roles in this new process. Political commentators and journalists provided up-to-date accounts and analyses. But historians of the region have been concerned not to write prematurely about this subject. Many were, like me, fascinated by the first generation of nationalist leaders, men like Sukarno, Tengku Abdul Rahman and Ho Chi Minh, followed by Lee Kuan Yew, Suharto, Ferdinand Marcos and Ne Win, but hesitate to take on full-length studies about the nations these men had set out to build. Through their leadership, their peoples were offered sharply distinct visions of their countries' future. Would historians wait, as they are wont to do, for all sources to be available before they began research on their countries? How long would it be before the story of each country in Southeast Asia is told by the historians themselves?

When I returned from the Bangkok conference, I brought the question to the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (lSEAS) and was gratified when the then director, Professor Chan Heng Chee, encouraged me to try and find out. With that support, I approached five of the leading historians of the original members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN in 1968 consisted of Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore). They were Taufik Abdullah, Charnvit Kasetsiri, Reynaldo Ileto, Cheah Boon Kheng and Edwin Lee. We met to discuss the feasibility of a joint project to write the contemporary histories of these five countries. They agreed that this was worth doing and I sought funding from ISEAS and other sources to allow us to proceed. The support we received enabled us to meet and hold a series of meetings to define the scope of the project.

We began our meetings by focusing on the common features of the Southeast Asian "nation-state". We knew that there had been attempts to study the early products of new nationalisms in the region. It was clear that some of the peoples of each country were less prepared than others to be citizens of these nation-states. Furthermore, the unfamiliar models taken from Europe have seemed alien, and each of the leaders who advocated using these models often had great difficulty explaining why anyone of

them should be adopted. We also noted that historians in these countries have closely observed the stresses and strains that were generated, and some have felt the urge to study the actual business of nation-building more systematically. The five historians who met with me to discuss this phenomenon felt that they would not wait any longer before they began their task. They agreed that they would use their historical skills to take on this project.

We first decided on the kind of a series we should write. Very early, we agreed that each country had its own story and each author would write a volume about his own country. At the same time, we should try to find out how much the five countries had in common and whether we should adopt a common approach to the subject. From the discussions over several months outlining the main features of the nation-building story in the region, it became increasingly clear that there were several kinds of stories here. Despite their coming together in a regional organization like ASEAN, each of the five had very different experiences inside their countries. While we were not surprised by this fact, it was astonishing how different their respective stories were. The more we surveyed what each country had to do to define the kind of nationhood it wanted, the more it seemed that the ingredients each started with had forced their leaders to seek very different routes to achieve their goals. We agreed that it would be a mistake for us to try to treat them as if they were different examples of some given model or models. Although the foreign models that each country used may have appeared to share common characteristics, what each country inherited from previous regimes at the point of independence was so different that we had to think afresh what needed to be done to capture the essence of each experience. We agreed that these differences justified our adopting distinct and separate approaches to each story. Ultimately, each volume would follow the dynamics of change that each country encountered and allow that to determine the shape of the history that the country should have. This series of histories is the result.

Let me place the series in a broader context. The study of modern nationalism was the work of European historians. The historians of the American and French Revolutions were the first to underline the global

significance of the nation-state project while others looked further back to study the evolutionary stages of earlier nations like The Netherlands, Britain, Spain and Portugal. During the 19th century, historians worked with linguists, philosophers and lawyers to shape narrower kinds of nationalisms in Central and Eastern Europe. Their work stimulated social scientists later to embark on theoretical explanations of what the nation-state system meant to the world. The work of historians, however, continued to be influential, most of all by providing ideas for many of the Asian nationalists of the 20th century. Those who studied in Western universities, in particular, were inspired by these histories to use the ideas in them to prepare their platforms for political leadership.

For the post-World War II period, nationalism was largely seen in the region as a positive development, an organized quest for independence, freedom, and modernization. The Cold War determined that leaders of the newly independent countries could look in at least two different political directions. Some chose to build their nations with the help of capitalism and liberal democracy. These would use the Western European models as the basis for nationhood and, for them, the best way to modernity was through an open market economy. Soon, they found the United States more than willing to help them along that route. Others chose to follow the socialist path either against the capitalist democracies or seeking some kind of neutralism in the Cold War. These were encouraged by the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China to contest the global economic and military power represented strongly in Asia by the United States. The more radical among them went further to advocate the overthrow of neo-colonial and feudal structures by mobilizing the working poor who were the majority in each of their countries.

The new leaders soon discovered how difficult nation-building was. It was not enough to proclaim independence. They needed outside help if they wanted to modernize quickly. Large amounts of capital were needed to build a new infrastructure for industrial development. Basic literacy was essential, so were the skills that could only come from secondary and tertiary education for the next few generations. But the nation-state as a new kind of polity was more alien than most people realized at the time.

Learning from Western and Eastern Europe, or Japan, China or the United States, may have looked easy for the small group of elites who captured power in the post-colonial states, but building a stable and prosperous nation has been much more elusive.

The responses by historians in the former colonial territories of Southeast Asia have varied from country to country, from those in older countries like the kingdom of Thailand to that of the Philippines, and from those in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore to those of war-tom states like Burma (Myanmar), Vietnam and Cambodia. Up to now, these different national experiences have largely been studied professionally by political scientists, and the dominance by political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists has continued to the present day. On the whole, there have been few academic historians of the region who have ventured into the period after 1950. This is understandable. The first generation of historians had enough to do to write the story of national origins, often to meet a teleological need, because they realized that the task of nation-building from scratch was a painful one. Some felt it their duty to delineate the contours of the future by giving a new and greater certainty to their countries' more distant pasts.

However, I believe that historians here, as in Europe and elsewhere, will have an important part in shaping future understanding of the phenomenon of nation-building in this part of the world. It is now more than fifty years since many of the new states began making their respective nations. There is now a rich record for historians to study and some official files are open for the first decades of nationhood. Those who wish to bring history closer to the present can now begin to do so. Theirs is a different kind of training, and their intellectual make-up and methodology have much to offer the subject. Therefore, it is time for more historians to take up the challenge and tell the story of the nation-building that many of them have themselves lived through. More than ever, we should not depend on existing theories of nationalism but look closely at the actual task of building nations. The study of each national history should take into account the specific conditions of the nationalism found within its borders. When more historians write their countries' contemporary nation-building history, other social scientists may look at the subject afresh, examine new facts and

interpretations, and re-assess the theoretical work done so far. They might find that a new set of theories would be needed to make sense of what the new nation-states of Southeast Asia have achieved. Or, they might find that the simultaneous development of nations in the context of an exceptional regionalism like ASEAN has rendered previous ideas of nationalism inapplicable, if not irrelevant, and a new paradigm is needed.

Until we have done the work, it is premature to talk about a borderless region, least of all a new world order in which nation-states and nationalisms will begin to fade away. From what is known so far of the modern history of “a world of nation-states”, it would seem that nation-states are here to stay, if only as basic units of regional groupings that will increasingly play a major role as distinct protagonists. Therefore, the sooner we have the more recent developments of aspiring nation-states fully studied by historians in their regional setting, the sooner we will know how to live with them and even how to make them serve the cause of peace in our region.

The writing has taken longer than we first anticipated. We are grateful to Professor Chan Heng Chee’s successors, Professor Chia Siow Yue and Ambassador Kesavapany, for their sustained support for our project. In addition, the Lee Foundation, Singapore, and the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, Taipei, helped to fund the project and I would like to thank them for their generous support.