



Photo of Indomie 'mewah', prepared with sambal prawns and pete (alt. petai, or stink beans), by me



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I've been in Jakarta for a week, and have thoroughly indulged (perhaps over-indulged) in my favourite Indomie.

1. For the uninitiated, Indomie makes, quite simply, the most delicious instant noodles in the world (and 275 million Indonesians will fight anyone who says otherwise). It is a staple of many family larders in [#SoutheastAsia](#), and provides affordable sustenance and comfort to many in the region.

2. Indomie is also the world's largest producer of instant noodles and 10th most chosen consumer brand. But have you wondered why instant noodles are so beloved in [#Indonesia](#), given that its key ingredient, wheat, is not indigenous to the region?

3. In 1966, near the height of the Vietnam War, Indonesian general Suharto was in the process of "easing Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, out of office" after a failed communist coup. The new leader had yet to consolidate his power but badly needed to keep his people fed if he was to be accepted.

4. Rice was then the staple of Indonesian life, and Indonesia was seriously short of it. Supplying food to support the nascent anti-communist Suharto regime therefore became an important part of a massive effort by Western nations, led by the United States. However, Indonesia required much more rice than even the US could supply, and so part of the food aid was in the form of wheat, of which the US had stockpiles.

5. In November 1967, US President Lyndon Johnson approved a USD 325 million aid package for Indonesia. Much of this aid came in the form of wheat, which Washington pressed Suharto to accept under the "Food for Peace" programme. Suharto conceded that "it would be in the long-term interest of Indonesia for wheat to be increasingly introduced" and hoped to "change national diet habits... so that bread is substituted for rice on the breakfast menu".

6. 60 years later, although rice still remains an essential staple, the diet of many Indonesians include wheat products in the form of instant noodles, which is cheaper than rice, available in a dazzling assortment of flavours, and has become a substitute for rice for many more middle to lower income consumers.

7. According to the US Department of Agriculture, per capita consumption of wheat in Indonesia shot up from a miniscule 0.3kg in 1966 to about 9kg at the start of the 1980s and doubled to 18kg in 2010. Today, each Indonesian consumes 32kg of wheat a year.

This post was adapted from Liem Sioe Liong's Salim Group: The Business Pillar of Suharto's Indonesia by [Richard Borsuk](#) and [Nancy Chng](#).

I have included, in the comments, links to a couple of podcasts about the history of Indomie, but for a detailed telling of how the Salim Group changed the consuming habits of hundreds of millions of Indonesians and came to own not only the largest producer of instant noodles but also the largest flour mill in the world, please read Rick and Nancy's book!