M. ISA SULAIMAN and GERRY VAN KLINKEN

The rise and fall of governor Puteh

This chapter started life with only one author, M. Isa Sulaiman. Four days after presenting it at the authors' conference in Jakarta on 22 December 2004, he was among those who died in the great tsunami that struck Aceh (see in memoriam in this volume). Henk Schulte Nordholt and I decided as editors that the orphaned chapter should pass into my foster-care for the final phase. Isa had lived at our house in Leiden for five months in 2003, where he and I talked often about Aceh. I dare to think he would agree with the way it has been taken forward. He is responsible for all the factual material (drawn from local news clippings and interviews with many of those named). My part has mainly been to step back from it and say why it was important to write this, as well as to make explicit some theoretical understandings that lay hidden between the lines. He was particularly impressed with a chapter on Aceh in David Brown's 'The state and ethnic politics in Southeast Asia' (1994). Some of Isa's masterly command of detail had to be sacrificed in the interests of the less specialized reader.

Gerry van Klinken

Introduction

Understandably enough, most media reporting on Aceh before the tsunami was about the war. It focussed on the two armed parties, Indonesia's armed forces TNI (Tentara Nasional Indonesia) and the Acehnese liberation army GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka). This has also been true of scholarly work on Aceh. This chapter aims to complement these other studies by describing the politics around the civilian administration. Although it retreated to its strongholds in the towns at the height of the insurgency before martial law was declared in May 2003, Aceh's civilian administration has never disappeared. At the time of writing it has once again expanded into the countryside, where it penetrates everyday life to a high degree. Indeed, it has grown. Special autonomy beginning in July 2001 has meant a considerably enlarged budget for the administration. It is important not to leave it out of

¹ Aspinall 2002; Aspinall and Crouch 2003; ICG 2003b; Kell 1995, Reid 2003; Robinson and Rosser 1998; Schulze 2004.

account. Studying the administration helps us to understand the continuities with the New Order. Reformasi has not brought as much change to Aceh as might be supposed. The military may come and go, but government goes on forever. Moreover, popular disenchantment comes as much from everyday administrative failures as from acts of exceptional military brutality. We cannot understand the armed resistance movement, the most extreme form of popular resentment, without understanding the corrupt factionalism of the civilian bosses. This chapter suggests that Aceh's main problem lies less in policy emanating from Jakarta than in a pattern of local government that is as deeply rooted in Aceh as it is elsewhere in Indonesia. When government is run along the lines of personalized elite favouritism – technically known as neo-patrimonialism – the resulting nepotism clashes so fundamentally with what people have a right to expect from the modern state that protest is almost unavoidable.

David Brown's (1994:112-57) clear-sighted chapter on neo-patrimonialism in Indonesia, written during the New Order, took Aceh as its case study. Max Weber defined a patrimonial system as one in which 'the object of obedience is the personal authority of the individual which he enjoys by virtue of his traditional status [...] What determines the relations of the administrative staff to the chief is not the impersonal obligations of office, but personal loyalty to the chief'. In today's world, traditional deference of this kind has become rare. People expect to participate in politics and to receive the benefits of economic development. Personal relations between patrons and their clients are still important, especially when state institutions are weak, but the relationship is now more pragmatic. Instead of providing protection in exchange for loyalty, the patron gives money in order to obtain political support. Hence the term 'neo' patrimonialism. One of those who rediscovered Weber was Eisenstadt. His paper, which itself became a classic, quoted Indonesian examples (Eisenstadt 1973:11-8). This approach was then widely adopted by Indonesianists such as Harold Crouch (1979) and Don Emmerson (1983) to analyse the New Order government under President Suharto. It remains a useful framework for analysis and has been applied to Aceh in this chapter.

A polity run along neo-patrimonial lines is inherently nepotistic, and its politics tend to be communal. This does not have to mean instability is inevitable, but Brown (1994:121) points out that it does face three inherent tensions. First is the tension between a cohesive patrimonial elite and elite factional disunity. The personalized nature of relationships makes it almost impossible to be inclusive, thus leaving dangerously dissatisfied factions on the margins. Second is the tension between the claim to universalistic administration and the practice of political favouritism. People today expect the government to be there for everyone. They become annoyed if it is not. Third is the tension between the concern of the patrimonial elites to exclude mass

political participation, and their countervailing interest in mobilizing mass political support without, at the same time, creating channels for oppositionist participation. In other words, patrimonial elites need to mobilize the masses to win their support, but they don't want things to get out of hand. At moments of transition, all three tensions can come together to create instability. The story of the rise and fall of Aceh's governor Abdullah Puteh illustrates the value of these observations.

This chapter begins with a sketch of social stratification in Aceh, which is then used to explain the political restructuring that took place in the 1999 elections. The second part describes the election for governor. This was an occasion for intense competition by local groups. The third part concerns the favouristic conduct of government under governor Puteh. The fourth is about reactions from society, ranging from the provincial parliament, to various marginal groups including the liberationist movement GAM. The chapter closes with conclusions.

State formation and the new middle class

It is a mistake to view neo-patrimonial politics as simply a continuation of pre-colonial patterns. The 'neo' in neo-patrimonial is important. The modern state has had a profound effect on society in the twentieth century. It created a new middle class out of a predominantly agrarian population, one that was highly dependent on the state's resources. This middle class consists of bureaucrats, state-dependent 'contractors', and independent professionals. Only the last group stands somewhat outside the patronage networks of state elites.

The Dutch brought an end to the sultanate of Aceh early in the twentieth century after they exiled the last sultan to Ambon and then to Batavia, where he died in 1903. They retained his princes, the *hulubalang*, because they needed them as intermediaries between government and people. However, these landed aristocrats were destroyed by popular militias led by Tgk Daud Beureueh in 1946 (Reid 1979:135-90; M. Isa Sulaiman 1997:114-64). Commercial plantations and oil wells begun in colonial times continue to be owned by outside capitalists with the support of government. Gas discovered in the 1970s contributed US\$ 2-3 billion a year by the 1980s (Dawood and Sjafrizal 1989). Most Acehnese, meanwhile, remain farmers. So the economy is divided between traditional farming on the one hand, and large plantations, timber and hydrocarbon exploitation, and industry on the other. The latter are owned by the state or by large capital outside Aceh. In the absence of local capitalists, a class of businesspeople arose who supplied goods and services including construction as partners with government

Map 9. Aceh

and large capital. Most people simply call them 'contractors, since they are dependent on government contracts. Since most economic resources are controlled by the state and channeled to Aceh through the national budget (Anggaran Pendapatan Belanja Negara, APBN) or the provincial budget (Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Daerah, APBD), it is easy to imagine that these people have a high stake in local politics. Contractors number in the thousands and are found in the provincial capital and every district capital. They have organized themselves into a number of associations.² The chairperson of the provincial chamber of commerce (Kamar Dagang Indonesia, Kadin) always comes from their circles. Bureaucrats are also an important category. Like the contractors they come from every layer within society and are found everywhere. Of course they also have an enormous stake in local politics, since their livelihoods depend on the state. Military officers also belong to this group. Retired military were politically influential under the New Order because they controlled the government party Golkar.

As elsewhere, a group of people not dependent on the government has also arisen. Especially since the 1980s they have been conducting advocacy on behalf of the poorer section of the population. They tend to be educated and include lawyers, journalists, and NGO activists. They too have numerous associations.

Religious teachers (*ulema*) occupy a respected position in this majority Islamic area. They are not a closed caste, since the entry requirement looks more to qualifications than descent. Some run religious schools in the village, others are paid by the state as teachers or religious judges. So only some (those who work for the Department of Religion or the *ulema* council Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) depend on the government for a living.

The 1999 election

Despite the state's economic dominance, its institutions are not strong in the sense of being able to impose its will regardless of personalities. Instead the state has built its authority on personal alliances with local elites, who remain factionalized, mainly by district of origin. This became evident when political change – democratization and decentralization – swept Indonesia after the end of the New Order in 1998. First we look at the effect of democratic competition in Aceh. This led to the election of a new governor in Aceh. The governor is extremely important to Aceh's middle class. The election

² Of the 16 associations, some are local like Asosiasi Kontraktor Aceh (AKA, Acehnese Contractor Association), while others are branches of national associations like Gabungan Pengusaha Konstruksi Nasional (Gapeknas, Federation of National Contractor Enterprises).

procedure demonstrated not only the great skill of the key players at predicting and manipulating outcomes, but also the emergence of district-based alliances that cut across political party lines.

Reformasi offered new freedoms to speak and to organize politically. Since most of the middle class lives in town, while the bulk of the population is rural, they depended on party organizers at the level of the district and subdistrict towns to reach their constituencies. Golkar had been the largest political force in Aceh since the 1987 election. Before that, it had been pipped to the post by the Islamic party PPP. The dominant figure in Golkar's Aceh branch was Maj-Gen (retired) T. Johan (1937-2001), who became provincial chairperson in 1993. He came from an aristocratic family in Seulimeum, Aceh Besar, and had been chief of staff of the Iskandar Muda military area command (1984-1985) and deputy governor of Aceh (1988-1993). From 1997 to 1999 he chaired the provincial parliament, where Golkar had 23 of the 45 seats against PPP's 12. In the 1999 election he stood for the national parliament (*Serambi Indonesia* 18-2-2001).

The national elections on 7 June 1999 were seriously disrupted by GAM. After the government ended the special military operation (Daerah Operasi Militer, DOM) in August 1998, many of its leaders had returned from exile in Malaysia to rebuild the separatist organization amid the new freedoms (M. Isa Sulaiman 2000:165-94). GAM intimidation meant almost no-one voted in the districts Pidie and North Aceh, and only half voted in East Aceh. The government was forced to estimate what the result might have been based on party votes outside these areas. The new provincial parliament formed on 5 October 1999 had 14 PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, Unity and Development Party) seats, nine PAN (Partai Amanat Nasional, Party of the National Message), eight Golkar, six PDI-P (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan, Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), eleven for smaller parties, and six allocated to the army and police.

Clearly, the election had failed to generate an absolute majority. Decisions were bound to be difficult. This immediately proved true when it had to decide who would occupy the chair and three deputy chairs, normally reserved for the largest parties in the election. PAN and an alliance of smaller parties made the first move, one that would have advantaged themselves. But this was cut short by Golkar leader T. Johan, who put together a deal whereby the chair went to PPP, and the deputy chairs respectively to PDI-P, Golkar and the army/police faction. At this, PAN and its allies staged a walk-out (*Kontras* 58(10-16 November 1999):12).

The altered composition of the provincial parliament immediately threatened the position of the governor, Syamsuddin Mahmud (1936-). He had just been reelected to a second term by a parliament still dominated by Golkar and the military. Claiming the governor was not doing enough to resolve the

Aceh conflict, lacked reformist zeal, and was corrupt, two PPP members collected enough signatures from fellow parliamentarians to put up a motion on 22 April 2000 calling for his dismissal (*Kontras* 86(24-30 May 2000):8). The motion passed. President Wahid responded by sacking Syamsuddin Mahmud the following month. He appointed a caretaker named Ramli Ridwan (1941-), who till then had been a senior official in the directorate for regional autonomy (Pemerintahan Umum dan Otonomi Daerah, PUOD) in the Interior Ministry in Jakarta.

Governor's election and the communal patron

Having won the chair of the provincial parliament, and having successfully manoeuvred the governor out of office, the once (mildly) oppositional party PPP naturally felt itself in a strong position to win the governorship. That they were to be outwitted by Golkar strongman and former soldier T. Johan had as much to do with district-based patron-client politics in Aceh as with Johan's considerable skills. Aceh in 2000 had eight districts, of which the richest and most populous were these three: Great Aceh (including Banda Aceh), North Aceh (Lhokseumawe), and East Aceh (Langsa).³ Provincial parliamentarians from each district gathered regularly in a 'caucus' of their own, regardless of party origins.

Of course money played a role in the governor's election. The 'success teams' of each of the three pairs of contenders for the province's highest office spent money particularly to persuade indecisive members. This took place in the greatest secrecy so it is difficult to be sure.⁴ However, the key to the successful election of Abdullah Puteh lay not in the money he spent but in the skill with which he was able to play one district off against another. In particular he was able to split the vote from the key district of Great Aceh.

Abdullah Puteh was elected in two rounds of voting at a special session of the provincial parliament held on 4 November 2000. In the first round Puteh and his running mate Azwar Abubakar won 25 votes, just short of the required 50% plus one. The two other pairs won respectively 14 and nine votes, with five invalid votes and one abstention. This disqualified the weak-

³ The others were Pidie, Central Aceh, South Aceh, Southeast Aceh, and West Aceh.

⁴ My (M. Isa Sulaiman – ed.) interviews with several members and success teams indicate that only one member of parliament refused to accept the money. The amount of money handed out by each success team was between Rp 50 and Rp 150 million per member. Some candidates handed out cheques that could only be cashed after he was elected. Several members received money from more than one candidate. The issue of bribery nearly became big news in Aceh in January 2001 when *Serambi Indonesia* newspaper picked up grumbles from the success team of a losing candidate about the cheques they themselves had given to various honourable members. However, the rumour disappeared after the Aceh Public Prosecutor promised to investigate.

est of the three candidate pairs. In the second round Puteh's vote went up to 33, enough to declare him the winner. His supporters hugged each other in joy, while the losers slumped in their seats, unable to believe what they had just seen.

How did Puteh do it? The rules in the new electoral law (Law no. 22/1999) specified that candidates for governor and deputy governor should go together in one packet, to ensure they could work together. Any two people who satisfied basic selection criteria were allowed to register as potential candidate pairs. The parliamentary party factions then chose from among these potential candidates those pairs they wished to support as candidates. This reduced number of pairs then submitted to a secret ballot in parliament to determine the winning pair. Each pair had a 'success team', normally consisting of politicians, businesspeople and bureaucrats, who would try to lobby the parliamentarians on their behalf at each stage of the process. By the time selection of potential candidates closed in September 1999 there were six names for governor on the table, or five serious names since one (T. Syaokani Markam) lacked supporters in parliament. All five were bureaucrats or former bureaucrats, who had built a following in Acehese society while in office. They were these:

1. Ir Abdullah Puteh (1948-) from East Aceh, Golkar activist
2. Drs A. Malik Raden (1945-), from Great Aceh, senior Education Department official (Kepala Kanwil)
3. Drs M. Kaoysyah (1940-), from North Aceh, PPP activist
4. Ir Iskandar Husin (1946-), from Pidie, secretary-general in the State Ministry of Human Rights
5. Ramli Ridwan (1942-), from North Aceh, acting governor

Only two of the five were active in political parties (the others being prevented by their official positions), but strangely enough this did not translate to greater political support for them. Only PPP and PAN put forward candidates from their own ranks. PPP had the most seats in parliament, and this should have put PPP activist Kaoysyah in a good position. But party support was split along district lines. It failed to unite behind Kaoysyah, who was from North Aceh. Five PPP members from Great Aceh all belonged to the Great Aceh caucus, and they supported Malik Raden, who was from their own district. Another PPP parliamentarian, from East Aceh, supported Abdullah Puteh for a similar reason. Puteh also managed to attract the support of another PPP parliamentarian from West Aceh. Thus the PPP vote was divided among three candidates. Kaoysyah's position was further weakened by Ramli Ridwan, the ambitious acting governor, who also came from North Aceh. Thus the already meagre six parliamentarians from North Aceh divid-

ed their votes between two candidates.

PAN, the second largest party in parliament, was bedevilled by similar problems. Too small to aim for governor, this party hoped at least to score deputy governor, and initially prepared four of its members to step forward (later reduced to two). Disagreements developed over which gubernatorial candidate they should be teamed with. Some members favoured Abdullah Puteh, others Kaosyiah, others again Iskandar Husin. District considerations again played the major role. The resulting proliferation of PAN-supported pairs divided the PAN vote the way the PPP vote had also been divided.

PDI-P and the alliance of small parties were too small to take initiative but supported Abdullah Puteh, Malik Raden, and Iskandar Husin.

Golkar members similarly supported different candidates depending on their respective district of origin. Some wanted the acting governor Ramli Ridwan, others the Education Department official Malik Raden. But provincial Golkar chairperson T. Johan supported Abdullah Puteh, and took advantage of his own party's divisions to pair Puteh with a deputy gubernatorial candidate from his own district of Great Aceh.

The chances of the other candidates were imperilled by the same district-based considerations. Malik Raden, for example, would have won friends by giving facilities to contractors and politicians through his position at the Education Department, and he had been active in various Islamic organizations in the 1970s. But the fractured PPP vote, and the presence of two other Great Aceh candidates, weakened his support. Iskandar Husin, too, had a wide network through his earlier work in the Transmigration Department and his social involvement as chairman of the provincial football association among others. But his Pidie support base of only six Pidie parliamentarians was too narrow for success in a parliament numbering 54.

All this worked in favour of Abdullah Puteh. Puteh was born into a commoner family in Idi, East Aceh. He graduated from the prestigious Bandung Technical Institute (Institut Teknologi Bandung, ITB) and had been living in Jakarta since he became chairman of the government-minded youth organization Komite Nasional Pemuda Indonesia (KNPI, National Indonesian Youth Committee) in 1984-1989, where he succeeded the later Golkar strongman Ir Akbar Tanjung. Between 1992-1997 he served in national parliament as representative of Golkar for his birth district. In 1998 he became deputy secretary-general of the national Golkar executive. He had a business in Jakarta recruiting workers to send overseas, and another together with Abdul Ghafur developing oil palm in West Aceh. These ventures generated a wide network of connections. He had challenged for the Aceh governorship in 1998, but Syamsuddin Mahmud won a second term instead. However, he nurtured relations with an array of people from various districts who were dissatisfied with Syamsuddin Mahmud. The East Aceh caucus also sup-

ported their local boy. And Akbar Tanjung was able to lean on Golkar's Aceh members to give Puteh a hand. This last source of support became decisive when T. Johan swung behind Puteh, as we shall see.

At its first pleno session on 30 September 2000, parliament voted on the five pairs of potential candidates led by the names above, in order to select three pairs. Kaoysyah and Ramli Ridwan were eliminated in this round. This left Abdullah Puteh, Malik Raden, and Iskandar Husin, each with their partner. They enjoyed the most cross-party support. Five of the six factions voted for Puteh (the military/police abstained), while only four and three voted for the other two respectively.

Ramli Ridwan, the disappointed acting governor, at this stage tried to use his powers to persuade the Interior Minister and the President to cancel the next round of voting, on the grounds of irregularities in this round. As a result President Wahid told a visiting parliamentary delegation on 23 October to postpone the gubernatorial election and concentrate on a negotiated peace with GAM (*Serambi Indonesia* 24-10-2000). But the other parliamentarians objected angrily that no peace could be built by a governor lacking legitimacy, and parliament went ahead with its next meeting on 4 November as planned regardless of the President's feelings (*Serambi Indonesia* 30-10-2000; *Kontras* 109(1-7 November 2000):13). This latter course of action would have been impossible under the New Order, when provincial parliaments merely rubber-stamped President Suharto's wishes as conveyed along military and Golkar channels.

Puteh already enjoyed the strongest cross-party support, but now T. Johan's strategy of selecting a running mate for Puteh began to pay off. First, this deputy gubernatorial candidate came from Great Aceh, thus pulling in votes from other Great Aceh members regardless of party affiliation once the field had narrowed. Second, both he and Johan himself were retired soldiers, and this won the support of the assembly's military and police members. Combined with the various contradictions that made life difficult for the other remaining candidates, this ensured Puteh's quick success on 4 November.

The administrative structure that governor Puteh had to work with was quite different to that of his predecessors. Regional autonomy laws (Law no. 22/1999 and Law no. 25/1999) gave greater powers to districts than the province, separated the legislative from the executive and thus from the governor's control, and passed more control over money to the regions. The conflict in Aceh had also given rise to two special laws for Aceh (Law no. 44/1999 and Law no. 18/2001), which returned greater powers to the province, and increased the influence of religious *ulema* on local government. These laws also increased Aceh's oil and gas receipts by respectively 55% and 40% over the provisions in Law no. 25/1999, though only for eight years.

Scholars have doubted whether giving greater powers to districts has made them more effective and democratic. A district head with more control over money can become a 'little king' if they can strike a deal with the local parliamentary chairperson, business, and military commander (H. Schulte Nordholt 2003:572). Syarif Hidayat (2002:47) has shown in Riau, Banten and West Nusa Tenggara how the regional autonomy laws have primarily benefited local elite interests. Hadiz (2003c:603) similarly showed that democratic institutions in mayoral elections in Medan and Jakarta in 2000 were hijacked by parasitic interests incubated by the New Order government. How would Aceh fare, where autonomy was focussed more on the provincial level?

Officials and their affiliations

Governor Abdullah Puteh and deputy governor Azwar Abubakar were sworn in by the Interior Minister on 25 November 2000. The deputy's role was restricted to disaster relief (Satuan Koordinasi Pelaksana Penanggulangan Bencana Alam, Satkorlak), and otherwise mainly ceremonial, though he did have a say in the distribution of important positions. The governor's first task was to reorganize his administrative structure in accordance with the new laws, as well as to make fresh appointments in the bureaucracy. He owed his 'success team' a favour, especially T. Johan. When the incumbent provincial secretary retired, Puteh replaced him with one of the assistant provincial secretaries, a man from Great Aceh, Johan's home district. He also embraced his political rival Malik Raden, the gubernatorial candidate from Great Aceh, by appointing him as head of the provincial training board (Badan Pendidikan dan Pelatihan, Badan Diklat). Malik Raden would otherwise have retired from his position at the Education Department, which was to be dissolved in favour of a provincial Education Service. Several of Raden's former Education Department colleagues, one from Great Aceh and one from East Aceh, were also given positions. Thus governor Puteh, himself from East Aceh, built an alliance with the Great Aceh elite, and with the Islamic network Pelajar Islam Indonesia (PII, Indonesian Islamic Students Organization) by placing Malik Raden's followers in some important posts. These allies were essential if he was to face up to his challengers. His other key appointments, made in the course of 2001-2003, mainly came from his own district of East Aceh, as well as from those in other districts who had supported his election.⁴

⁴ For example, the provincial planning board (Badan Perencanaan dan Pembangunan Daerah, Bappeda) went to economist Prof. Dr T. Iskandar Daud, university lecturer from East Aceh, while the Assistant for Aceh Specialness was filled by Drs Zainudin Saman, formerly at the religion office (Kanwil Departemen Agama Aceh) and also from East Aceh.

Favouritism in development projects

Financial autonomy took effect the month after Abdullah Puteh took office. Whereas in the New Order most government money passed down to the regions through provincial offices of central government departments, now all but two of these offices were dissolved in favour of provincial services (*dinas*) or boards under the control of the provincial governor. (The exceptions were Religion and Justice.) The governor was compensated for the extra salary burden through an annual block grant of around Rp 300 billion (Dana Alokasi Umum, DAU, General Allocation Grant), while special tasks such as education and health were funded through another grant (Dana Alokasi Khusus, DAK, Special Allocation Grant).

Of the greatest importance were oil and gas receipts, which increased enormously under Law no. 25/1999. As a result, the provincial budget (APBD) more than doubled to Rp 542 billion between 2000 and 2001 (see Table 1). Law no. 18/2001 added even more to these hydrocarbon receipts, reaching Rp 2.1 trillion in 2002 and Rp 2.3 trillion in 2003.⁶ The latter were divided up between the province and various districts, especially the two producing districts North Aceh and East Aceh. Governor Puteh placed 30% of it into a provincial education fund. This meant that the provincial budget in 2002 went up nearly three times again in 2002 over the previous year, and it reached Rp 1.573 trillion in 2003. Most of this came from oil and gas. Of course Aceh also still received funds from the national budget (APBN) through the remaining offices of the national departments. But most of this large pot of money was under the control of the governor.

Table 1. Provincial budget (APBD) and national budget (APBN) spent in Aceh (billions of rupiah)

	1993/1994	2001	2002	2003
APBD	4,058	542,753	1,572,094	1,579,000
APBN*	460,358	760,000	888,000	1,024,000
Inpres	145,313	—	—	—
Total	659,729	1,302,753	2,460,094	2,603,000

* In 1993/1994 sectoral projects funded out of the national budget APBN were generally spent by the relevant provincial office (Kanwil) of the national department, so-called 'vertical' units. Since 2001 only about 15% of these funds were still spent by the vertical unit, namely Religion, Justice, Police, Public Prosecutor and the State University. Source: Biro Keuangan and Bappeda.

⁶ *Serambi Indonesia* 20-3-2001; T. Rivolsa Ismail 2004.

The huge increase in funds at the governor's behest did not go uncontested. Especially the district heads of East Aceh and North Aceh (who themselves also enjoyed vastly increased budgets) questioned the size of the amount held back at the province for education. Puteh silenced them by promising the money would still be spent in the various districts. Nevertheless, this tremendous increase in financial autonomy, unbalanced by a proportionately tightened control regime, turned the governor and his team of officials into veritable money-spending machines. One consequence was the questionable electricity project described below. The governor and deputy governor also allocated themselves greatly increased 'routine expenditure' budgets (Table 2).

Table 2. Routine Expenditure Budgets (billions of rupiah)

	2001	2002	2003
Governor	2,245	4,090	6,560
Deputy governor	1,230	1,750	2,960
Total	3,475	5,840	9,520

Source: Aceh parliament secretariat.

The pyramidal power relations between the governor and his heads of services (*kepala dinas, asisten, biro, and badan*) allowed the governor to intervene in large projects carried out by these subordinate agencies and turn them to his own personal advantage or that of his cronies. Law no. 18/2000 permitted the governor to directly allocate projects, that is, without tendering. He made use of that to allocate billions of rupiah worth of contracts in 2001 and 2002. One example of a project that fell to his cronies was a printing machine worth Rp 4.2 billion for the Infokom Service. The contract went to a brother of Rusli Bintang, a contractor from Great Aceh who had supported Puteh. Tragically, the machine turned out to be second-hand, whereas the price had been marked up even above the real new price (*Modus* 19 (January/February 2003):6; *Serambi Indonesia* 28-2-2003). All these facilities bought Puteh valuable loyalty against his rivals.

It would take too long to describe all the instances of collusion one by one. Here we will only take two cases, namely the airline PT Seulawah NAD Air, and the development 'NGO' YPAB Nur Raudha. In both cases we will see how public interests overlapped with personal ones, how unclear the boundary was between the 'formal' and the informal in the conduct of government, and how a symbiotic relationship grew up for the mutual protection of governor Puteh and his closest officials and business colleagues.

PT Seulawah NAD Air

From this moment, things began to go wrong. Or rather, at first they went very well, before taking the inevitable nosedive. Troubled security after mid-1999 repeatedly disrupted road travel between Aceh and the outside world. The New Order had made Aceh nothing more than a 'hinterland' for Medan in North Sumatra. The cheapest safe alternative routes to Medan were the thrice-weekly Pelni ship, and the once-daily Garuda Boeing 737-300 flight. Seats on the flight to and from Medan were always hard to get. From Medan onward, flights were numerous. Wanting only the best for his region, Governor Abdullah Puteh took the option, not of opening the Medan air route to some private airline – though Bayu Airlines had already made an offer – but of setting up a provincial air carrier. His close colleague Sam A. Walean, an adventurous businessman from Menado who lived in Jakarta, in mid-April 2001 introduced Puteh to Datuk Mat Safuan, owner of Safuan Group Bhd. in Kuala Lumpur. Puteh talked to him about investing in an Aceh air service. Datuk Mat Safuan initially responded enthusiastically. He imagined not only flying Banda Aceh-Medan-Jakarta and Banda Aceh-Penang-Kuala Lumpur, but also taking Acehnese *haji* to Mecca, of whom there are more than 5,000 every year.⁷ Governor Puteh then instructed his confidante and Assistant for Finance and Development, Ir Usman Budiman, as well as Sam A. Walean and a contractor named Ramzi Tharfi who had supported him in hard times, to start building the company.

On 28 June 2001 PT Seulawah Air was registered in Jakarta with the notary Mrs Chairunnisa Said. The name was derived from Mount Seulawah, which rises up to form a backdrop for the provincial capital Banda Aceh, flanked on either side by Great Aceh and Pidie, the birthplaces of Acehnese culture. It was also the name of the Dakota aircraft the Acehnese people donated to President Sukarno representing the Indonesian government during the national revolution in 1948, and which is still regarded as the beginning of Garuda Indonesia Airways. Seven months later, on 28 January 2002, it officially changed its name to PT Seulawah NAD Air, for unclear reasons except that Safuan Group was no longer part of the project. Its initial capital had been planned to consist of six million shares with a nominal value of Rp 10,000 each. But the official announcement only mentioned about a million shares owned by the Aceh provincial government (NAD, Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam), 700 thousand by Sam Walean (director of PT Wawasan Sakti

⁷ Sam Walean said Datuk Safuan put down Rp 2 billion in July 2001 as an initial investment for PT Seulawah Air (*Modus* 3(14-24 May 2003):10). In fact the annual *haj* is organized through the Department of Religion, so Datuk Safuan's hopes of using Seulawah aircraft for this purpose were unrealistic.

Informindo Nusa), and 300 thousand by Ramzi Tharfi (director of PT Benzi Prima).⁸ Abdullah Puteh appointed Usman Budiman chief commissioner of the new airline. Provincial secretary Thantawi Ishak became a commissioner. Executive director was Sam Walean, with his office in Astha Building, Kebun Sirih, Jakarta. Ramli Tharfi was deputy director.

The next thing to do was obtain an Air Operation Certificate from the Transport Department, do a feasibility study, recruit 27 cabin staff, and find an aircraft. Since Safuan Group Bhd had withdrawn, they rented a Boeing 737-300 from Transmile Group Bhd, based in Kuala Lumpur (*Kontras* 251(30 July-5 August 2003):15).

In September 2002 the Transport Department issued an operational certificate. Governor Puteh felt it was time to present his achievement to Aceh's parliament as the representatives of the people. The problem was that in accordance with its deed, the one million shares or Rp 10 billion the provincial government had invested had to come from the provincial budget. By September 2002 Rp 6 billion of that amount had already been put in. But the law does not allow the governor to invest in a private company. The governor may invest only in a state-owned regional company, which can only be formed by parliamentary legislation. But PT Seulawah NAD Air was a private company. Two of the commissioners were key provincial officials, but the identity cards quoted in the charter only listed them as private individuals, not in their official capacity. So while Puteh announced on 23 September that he had taken Rp 6 billion out of the provincial budget for the carrier, a few months later it appeared that the government shares were listed in the name of the Aceh Regional Development Company (Perusahaan Daerah Pembangunan Aceh, PDPA) (*Serambi Indonesia* 24-9-2001).

With parliament satisfied, governor Puteh set about organizing the inaugural flight from Blang Bintang airport Banda Aceh. A spectacular ceremony on 25 September 2002 included 300 dancers to welcome President Megawati, who had come to cut the tape. Five hundred invitees from all over Aceh and beyond came in their traditional finery. Governor Puteh felt he wanted to make up to President Megawati, because on her first visit on 8 September

⁸ This statement by Usman Budiman is not consistent. In an interview on 3 December 2001, before the official name change, he said the Safuan Group Bhd owned Rp 20 billion in shares, the Aceh province 20%, and a private company 20% (*Kontras* 168(12-18 December 2001):13). But in the public presentation at the Infokom Hall on 23 September 2002 he no longer mentioned Safuan Group Bhd, but said the province owned 1 million shares, Transmile Group Bhd 1 million, PT Wawasan Sakti Infonusa 700 thousand, and PT Benzi Prima 300 thousand shares (*Suara Aceh* no. 174(15-30 September 2002):4). Later, when disagreement had broken out with Sam Walean, he never again mentioned shares owned by Transmile Group Bhd. Sam Walean said that Usman Budiman, witnessed by Abdullah Puteh, asked for 25% of the shares owned by PT Wawasan Sakti Infonusa, but Sam Walean refused to give them to him (*Modus* 3(14-24 May 2003):11).

2001 she had grown furious when someone in the audience had interrupted her. Being so highly dependent on the goodwill of government at the centre made regional officials bend over backwards to preserve harmonious relations. So it was not surprising to see a huge banner over the stage with the words: 'Mbak Mega... Smile, for you have brought 'Seulawah' back again'. The ceremony cost hundreds of millions of rupiah, perforce taken by governor Puteh from other projects since this was an unbudgeted activity.

Commercial flights commenced two days later, twice daily to Medan Aceh and twice weekly to Jakarta. Tickets were priced a little under those of Garuda. The rush for cheap tickets made Seulawah NAD a sought-after name among Banda Aceh travel agents. Agam Patra, a contractor and close colleague of governor Puteh, was soon awarded the sole agency on Seulawah NAD ticket sales in the provincial capital. This was the beginning of trouble with Sam Walean, whose promises to another business to make them sole agents had to go unfulfilled. Indeed the haste and untransparent collusion with which the company had been set up soon began to cause more conflicts. Passengers turned up with the same seat number. Shareholders began to grow suspicious of each other. For of the three shareholders, only the provincial government had actually put money into the venture, whereas the board of directors was dominated by a private company led by Sam Walean. On 31 October 2002, barely a month after operations had commenced, governor Puteh wrote Sam Walean effectively asking him to transfer his ticket sale funds to the private account of himself and that of Usman Budiman, at Bank Bukopin Jakarta account no. 1015736.01 55. Sam Walean apparently took no notice of the letter, so governor Puteh organized a meeting with the commissioners and directors at the Jakarta Hilton Hotel three days later. Participants were invited only by phone, but the meeting turned into a Shareholders General Meeting, which decided to terminate Sam Walean as executive director and replace him with former Garuda director M. Suparno, who knew governor Puteh well. Suparno soon fired Sam Walean's closest associates in the company, thus locking Walean out (*Modus* 1(16 April 2003):4).

Infuriated and claiming his rights as shareholder and founder had been abused, Sam Walean took Usman Budiman and Thantawi Ishak to court in Banda Aceh for falsely identifying themselves in the company's official charter as privately employed and not as civil servants. He also accused Abdullah Puteh and Usman Budiman of illegally ordering company money to be transferred to their private accounts, and alleged that the Shareholders General Meeting fell short of the requirements of commercial law.

This was a great embarrassment to governor Puteh and his cronies, and made them afraid. They sprouted loud rhetoric and began to lobby. They revealed that of all the shareholders only Aceh had put money on the table, while the identity card business had been the lawyer's oversight.

They privately asked Sam Walean to withdraw the case (*Modus* 1(16 April 2003):6). Feeling the wind in his back, Sam Walean evidently asked for Rp 3 billion compensation to settle out of court (*Modus* 9(29 August-9 September 2003):22). Whether there was a connection with his suit against the top provincial officeholder is unclear, but at the end of November 2002 police broke into Sam Walean's hotel room in Banda Aceh and arrested him for fornication (*Serambi Indonesia* 25-11-2002). Anyhow, Sam Walean's suit did intimidate governor Puteh, because after a meeting in Medan on 11 March 2003 both sides agreed to stop legal proceedings, while Sam Walean and Ramzi Tharfi, who had still not paid for their shares, were reinstated in the company (*Serambi Indonesia* 25-11-2002).

In Suparno's hands the carrier grew even more inefficient than it had been under Sam Walean. The wages bill blew out from Rp 150 million to Rp 450 million a month, while Ramzi Tharfi failed to store about Rp 200 million in Medan ticket sales. The company also faced intense competition on the Medan-Jakarta route. By early March 2003 outstanding payments to Transmile Group Bhd for aircraft lease and to Pertamina for fuel reached almost Rp 10 billion, despite parliament having earlier agreed to inject an additional Rp 4 billion (*Serambi Indonesia* 25-11-2002). As a result, Transmile Group Bhd took its aircraft back and Seulawah NAD ceased to fly after only six months in the air.

Stung by the crisis, parliament called the company management to give an accounting of itself on 20 March 2003. Sam Walean, strangely, was not called to testify. Since he knew more than anyone, the report presented to parliament was in the nature of an internal review, not an audit. The director of the Aceh Regional Development Company (PDPA), when asked to explain how Seulawah NAD shares came to be on its books, denied all knowledge of it. This in turn made governor Puteh and Usman Budiman all the more irate. They said PDPA was just an extension of the provincial government (*Kontras* 251(30 July-5 August 2003):16).

Clearly Seulawah NAD Air was now too debt-laden to operate again. It also still owed compensation to Sam Walean for dropping the court case against Abdullah Puteh and co. Nor was it possible any more to shift the billions of rupiah in debt to the provincial budget, as had happened earlier. Parliamentarians, and Abdullah Puteh's rivals, had run out of patience with the company. PT Seulawah NAD Air was bankrupt.

One avenue that did remain open was to charge the debt to some special or emergency project. This should be easy to do, since two of the commissioners, Thantawi Ishak dan Usman Budiman, held key positions in the provincial bureaucracy. Signs in that direction became evident when Usman Budiman took the 'eternal fund' of the Naval Commander's Institute (Lembaga Panglima Laut) worth Rp 8.4 billion in the government's posses-

sion and put it up as a guarantee for the Pertamina fuel bill. However, this came to nought when the institute and outside critics got wind of it (*Kontras* 251(30 July-5 August 2003):16).

A similar manoeuvre seemed to lie behind the emergency electricity supply project, undertaken by the provincial government to raise the supply by 12 Megawatts in 2003 at a cost of Rp 30 billion. Aceh gets much of its electricity from Medan via a high-tension line, but GAM militias repeatedly attacked the pylons carrying the cable. This was another opportunity to close the Seulawah NAD debt. After several meetings with governor Puteh, William Taylor from electrical supplier CV Sari Alam generously agreed to 'lend' Rp 3 billion via Usman Budiman to Suparno, the director of the bankrupt air carrier. William got a contract to supply 25 generators, but 14 of them were second-hand and three were seriously inoperable.⁹ As a result, Banda Aceh's on-again off-again electricity supply did not improve despite the generators project. This provided more material for Abdullah Puteh's rivals, who used it to demand that he be sacked.

YPAB Nur Raudha charity organization

Marlinda Purnomo (1964-), Abdullah Puteh's second wife, felt she must not sit idly by but should help her husband and do something for the people of Aceh. She felt the formal positions she held, as chairperson of the Family Welfare Program (Program Kesejahteraan Keluarga, PKK) and of the Provincial Handicraft Council (Dewan Kerajinan Daerah), did not give her enough room to 'do more' to help relieve the suffering of this afflicted society. As a woman, she was moved by the plight of women and children, initially those who lived around the governor's official residence. She talked about her ideas with colleagues within the same powerful circles. Of course they welcomed them, and soon she had declared a movement of concern for the nation's children. This was on 27 January 2001, when the wife of the Interior Minister installed her in the PKK and Handicrafts positions (*Serambi Indonesia* 28-1-2001). To give it concrete shape, she set up a legal body called the Yayasan Peduli Anak Bangsa Nur Raudha (YPAB Nur Raudha, Nur Raudha Foundation of Concern for the Nation's Children). The name was that of her daughter by Abdullah Puteh and meant 'light of Raudha', where Raudha is a holy place in Mecca in which prayers are surely answered. Linda Purnomo took the chair, and she was assisted by a number of provincial officials or (mainly) their wives (*Kontras* 167(5-11 December 2001):9).

For security reasons, and to bring the governor's palace closer to the

⁹ *Media Indonesia* 2-5-2004. Questioned by the police, William Taylor acknowledged he had negotiated with the governor several times to obtain the electricity project (*Serambi Indonesia* 4-6-2004).

people, the NGO opened an office just behind the governor's complex. A service centre and health clinic was set up for mothers and children to attend every Monday and Thursday. At first it aimed only to help those from the two *kampung* next to the governor's complex. Operational funds came from the flood relief fund chaired by deputy governor Azwar Abubakar (Rp 220 million), from the Industry Service (Rp 50 million) and from the Women's Empowerment Bureau (about Rp 50 million) (*Kontras* 167(5-11 December 2001):7). Pretty soon many people heard about the social work being done by YPAB Nur Raudha, and requests for funding assistance began to flow in from various directions. This naturally inspired Linda Purnomo to increase her fundraising efforts, and to expand her service network to more people. Using her position of influence, she lobbied heads of services and contractors to donate or make facilities available. District heads and mayors were asked to open branches of the organization in their respective districts and towns.

In July 2001 she auctioned paintings before government officials and contractors to raise funds for her foundation, and at her birthday party on 15 October 2001, in front of officials, she installed the wives of 12 district heads and mayors as heads of YPAB branches in their respective districts and towns (*Serambi Indonesia* 16-10-2001).

In short, donations in kind and in money soon became a steady stream into the foundation's coffers. Some of these were government programs transferred to the foundation, among them the mass circumcision for 1000 boys worth Rp 100 million from the Aceh Disaster Relief Fund (Satkorlak), the gift of an ambulance worth Rp 60 million from the Health Service and the handicraft skills course for school drop-outs worth Rp 25 million from the Education Service.¹⁰

Linda Purnomo's activism through YPAB Nur Raudha demonstrates clearly how fuzzy the boundary was between official and private business. This drew criticism from NGO activists with long experience at the grass-roots. Moreover they learned that the mass circumcision exercise, which should have been for 1000 people, was only given to 400 (*Kontras* 167(5-11 December 2001):5-11, 20). When they exposed what they knew through the mass media, it not only angered Linda Purnomo but also her husband Abdullah Puteh. He accused the newspaper that carried the expose of slandering his wife's organization (*Serambi Indonesia* 9-12-2001). The criticism did have an influence on YPAB Nur Raudha. Its secretariat moved to a humbler

¹⁰ It is difficult to know exactly how much money YPAB Nur Raudha obtained by means of government transfers or from contractors. The anti-corruption NGO Samak estimated Rp 9 billion worth of government projects in the 2001 provincial budget were implemented by YPAB Nur Raudha. Marlinda denies the figure is as high as this (*Kontras* 167(5-11 December 2001):7; *Kontras* 168(12-18 December 2001):24).

address in Tgk.Chik Di Tiro Street, and its social welfare activities were drastically scaled down from those of its first eight months. All the district branches closed down.

Collaborating with parliament

Governor Puteh's corruption and abuse of office could really only continue because Aceh's parliament exercised weak control. Although the recent legislative changes had given parliament greater powers, in other respects it continued to be burdened with the legacy of the New Order. Parliament remained a collective entity that lacked an opposition as is normal in a democracy. Even PAN and the alliance of small parties, despite walking out at a critical stage, still took their place on important commissions. Decisions were also still taken in a hierarchical fashion, beginning with the Leaders Consultative Body (Badan Musyawarah Pimpinan) then down through the commission and factional meetings. Governor Puteh often made use of this hierarchy to ask parliamentary leaders to approve his 'emergency' or 'urgent' measures, including the PT Seulawah NAD company and the helicopter purchase to be analysed below. At the end of 2000 he obtained 'in principle' agreement letters from the parliamentary speaker for the next year's budget and for the supply of new cars, even though parliament had not yet debated the budget. Moreover parliamentarians abused their power of veto over the governor's annual report to wring concessions out of him, thus building collusive links between governor Puteh and parliamentary speaker Muhammad Yus.

Parliamentarians are not rich, and they also have to contribute to party coffers out of their own salaries. The large increase in the provincial budget following special autonomy gave parliament a lot more money to spend on itself. Routine parliamentary expenditure more than tripled to Rp 18.9 billion over the three years to 2003. The speaker's house, only built in 1998, was expensively renovated in 2002 at a cost of Rp 800 million. Each new project was an opportunity for commission chairpersons and their contractor friends to siphon money into their own pockets. Governor Puteh knew how to turn these material temptations into support for his own plans. The electrical generators scandal, for example, involved a 'loan' of Rp 750 million to the deputy speaker at that time, T. Bakhrum Manyak, as 'thanks' for services provided (*Serambi Indonesia* 28-1-2001).

When a small number of critical parliamentarians tried to challenge this collaboration between the speaker and the governor, they paid for it dearly. In November 2001 several members from the smaller parties tried to put together a motion of no confidence in the speaker Muhammad Yus. They had enough signatures, but Muhammad Yus crushed it by simply refusing

to put it on the agenda (*Serambi Indonesia* 6-12-2001). They then tried another tack, namely to propose that direct elections for governor be implemented immediately. A new law (Law no. 18/2001) envisaged direct elections in five years time, but did permit a faster implementation (*Kontras* 224(8-14 January 2003):14). When, under public pressure and with sufficient numbers in parliament, it was finally discussed in January 2003, Muhammad Yus rejected the proposal as un-Islamic, and the military/police faction said Aceh was not safe for elections (*Serambi Indonesia* 7-1-2003; *Kontras* 226(22-28 January 2003):3). It took more than a year before a direct elections measure was approved, by which time Aceh was no longer ahead of the rest. For their trouble, the two parliamentarians who had been most vocal in their opposition to Speaker Muhammad Yus were evicted from parliament. They were Mukhlis Mukhtar and Hasbi Bustamam, both members of the PPP of which Muhammad Yus was provincial chair. Thus parliament was robbed of two of its critical voice.

Reactions from GAM and other marginal groups

In this section we see another of David Brown's three tensions, namely the tension between the claim to universalistic administration and the practice of political favouritism. There are always going to be those for whom nepotism and collusion are completely unacceptable. The anger such practices generate lies at the heart of the oppositional agenda. Indeed one might say the emotions around corruption allegations are the main resource used in inter-elite competition in Indonesia. At the extreme end of the oppositional spectrum stood the separatist movement GAM. At its other end stood a group of critical professionals who remained engaged with the game played by the establishment.

Unlike the bureaucrats, politicians and contractors, GAM remained entirely cynical about the special autonomy package offered by the central government. GAM spokesperson Sofyan Daud said in July 2001 that special autonomy was merely a trick to turn the area beyond Java into an Indonesian colony. The oil royalties, too, were no extraordinary generosity, since the government had long enjoyed Aceh's riches while returning only about 1% to Aceh (*Kontras* 144(4-10 July 2001):5; *Kontras* 163(7-13 November 2001):5). GAM wanted a referendum on Aceh's future association with Indonesia (*Serambi Indonesia* 28-2-1999, 20-2-2000). GAM had no interest in who became the next governor, and its commanders were satisfied merely to collect revolutionary taxes (*hak sabil* and *pajak nanggroe*), especially from government offices, contractors and politicians, in order to finance their struggle. Recalcitrants faced terror or intimidation. Since GAM effectively controlled most of the countryside at this time, all candidates for governor took care to make personal contact with its leaders in order to avoid intimidation. A bomb caused some

damage at parliament house on 11 September 2000, just as candidates were being selected. Neither as candidate nor as governor did Abdullah Puteh dare to confront GAM. He always said diplomatically that GAM activists were not enemies but 'our brothers', though there remained some differences between them about Aceh's status within Indonesia.¹¹

With most local elites having been co-opted, social control over the government passed to 'liberal' professionals whose livelihoods did not depend on the government, especially NGO activists, lawyers and journalists. They included journalist Kamal J. Farza and Akhirudin, who both coordinated Sorak (Solidaritas Rakyat Anti Korupsi, People's Anti-Corruption Solidarity), human rights activist Dr Humam Hamid, his younger activist brother Farhan Hamid who taught at Syah Kuala University, and M. Saleh who wrote for the national weekly *Forum Keadilan* and led the local *Modus* tabloid. Some were new to the political arena, others supported alternative gubernatorial candidates in 2000. This 'critical group' (*kelompok kritis*) raised issues such as dishonesty in the gubernatorial elections, abuse of office, illegality and corruption under governor Puteh. Sometimes they mobilized the masses to protest outside the provincial parliament, and they took corruptors to court.¹²

Puteh was not an easy target to bring down. He had such a close relationship with parliament that the activists' colleague Mukhlis Mukhtar there was kicked out, as we saw. He had the power to veto the appointment of Public Prosecutor and Police Chief, and plenty of money to spend on renovating the Prosecutor's home. Unsurprisingly therefore, the Public Prosecutor rejected the corruption suit they entered on the grounds that it was unproven (*Serambi Indonesia* 19-11-2002; *Modus* 3(14-24 May 2003):4).

Blocked at home, the critical group then took their demands to the national level, since they too had elite connections in Jakarta. A 2002 decision of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR, Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat) on the implementation of special autonomy in Papua and Aceh (TAP MPR-RI no. IV/2002) said government had a responsibility to bring peace to Aceh. They took this as their legal basis to demand Abdullah Puteh be sacked. Kamal Farza took a petition signed by 40 Acehnese NGOs to the Interior Minister. The effort got a hearing from an influential 'Team of Five for Aceh', and from President Megawati herself on 4 September 2002, briefly turning it into a national news item.¹³

¹¹ *Kontras* 121(24-30 January 2001):22-3. Acting governor Ramli Ridwan also met secretly with GAM in the interior of Great Aceh between June and November 2000.

¹² For example, *Serambi Indonesia* 8-10-2002.

¹³ It consisted of Muhammadiyah chairperson Syafii Maarif, MUI chairperson KH Ali Yafi, Islamic intellectual Nurcholis Majid, former Interior Minister Suryadi Sudirja, and former Foreign Minister Ali Alatas. Syafii Maarif supported the petition (*Forum Hukum dan Keadilan* 22 (15 September 2002)).

Although Abdullah Puteh responded defiantly and threatened to stop anyone who disturbed his government (*Serambi Indonesia* 16-11-2002), the issue continued to gather momentum in Jakarta. It was noticed by the new Aceh Desk at the office of the Coordinating Minister for Politics and Security (Menko Polkam) Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. One of the staff there was Kaosyiah, the candidate for governor who lost out to Puteh. A high profile workshop on conflict resolution in Aceh at the prestigious Indonesian Academy of Sciences (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia, LIPI) on 23 April 2003 included a recommendation to replace the governor (*Modus* 3(14-24 May 2003):20). Minister Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was about to bring these considerations to a cabinet meeting when they were brought into the open by a Metro TV news item on 25 April. Governor Puteh swung into action and began phoning his Golkar contacts. As a result Golkar chairperson and House of Representatives Speaker Akbar Tanjung declared that governor Puteh had been democratically elected and the central government had no right to intervene (*Serambi Indonesia* 27-4-2003). Back in Aceh, Puteh's loyalists in parliament and the bureaucracy also spoke out in his support (*Modus* 3(14-24 May 2003):19). Mixed signals from Aceh led Jakarta to take a middle course. On 28 April 2003 Interior Minister Hari Sabarno said no decision had been taken on dismissing governor Puteh but he would send a team to investigate the corruption allegations (*Serambi Indonesia* 29-4-2003, 3-5-2003, 4-5-2003).

Governor Puteh had won a reprieve. He issued some rather general statements in his defence, for example reminding his hearers that only a quarter of the money from Jakarta stayed at the province while the rest flowed to districts beyond his control, but avoided addressing specific issues (*Kontras* 226(22-28 January 2003):9). Indeed, the promised corruption investigation against him had to pass through one of two official finance watchdogs, but only after receiving permission from the governor. This as good as guaranteed that the investigation would fail.¹⁴ For public consumption, governor Puteh moved Usman Budiman, of the PT Seulawah NAD Air scandal, sideways into another job. He also sent his closest cronies to plead with the senior journalist M. Saleh, who had exposed one scandal after another, to ease up on the governor, while offering to 'help out' his lightly funded *Modus* tabloid. In July he took the lecturer and activist Farhan Hamid to court in Jakarta for defamation over a story about a road in the Mount Leuser National Park, demanding Rp 100 billion in compensation (*Kompas* 27-3-2003; *Serambi Indonesia* 22-7-2003; *Modus* 6(20-30 July 2003):10).

In the midst of these elite tussles the central government declared a

¹⁴ The two agencies were BPKP, authorized to audit projects funded from the national budget, and Bawasda, for provincial projects.

military emergency on 19 May 2003. The Iskandar Muda military area commander Maj-Gen Endang Suwarya became martial law administrator, while governor Puteh was a member of his council. Fifty thousand police and soldiers began operations to hunt down GAM and seize back territory. Hundreds of NGO activists from the critical group fled the province. Bureaucrats, parliamentarians and contractors warmly welcomed the operation, because it relieved them from GAM intimidation and extortion as well as from annoying criticism by the liberals. Thus governor Puteh, who had previously spoken about GAM as his 'brothers', told a meeting in his native East Aceh he was offering a Rp 50 million reward for information leading to the arrest of the controversial GAM commander Ishak Daud, something he would not have dared to do earlier. He now stood shoulder to shoulder with the military to eliminate GAM (*Serambi Indonesia* 3-8-2003).

The third tension of neo-patrimonialism, according to David Brown, is the risk associated with mass mobilization. Governor Puteh had to take this risk, since GAM and the critical group had been doing the same beyond his reach. But he was always cautious in this regard, choosing to address audiences on cultural and religious themes rather than social ones. A week after becoming governor he held a Quranic celebration in his official residence, inviting religious teachers from all over Aceh. On 19 December 2000 President Wahid himself came to Banda Aceh to declare the implementation of Islamic law (*syariat* Islam), which was later followed up with several institutional innovations. A good portion of the windfall oil and gas money passed into these new religious institutions, to keep them busy with various activities.¹⁵ In short, religion and custom were manipulated to support the government's conflict resolution strategies, while the elite was smothered with money and facilities to keep them on side. Satisfied he had won the upper hand, governor Puteh reminded his rivals to be patient until he completed his term in office. 'The desire to be governor is natural and legitimate. Do not let it stoop to unhealthy means [...] It's a good thing my 'martial arts' are up to the job, otherwise I would have been finished long ago. When a blow comes from the left, I know exactly how to avoid it.' He described his rivals as 'mere learners' in the martial arts arena (*Kontras* 242(21-27 May 2003):12-3).

However, governor Puteh's rhetoric was not sufficient to silence the critical group. They argued that the martial law operation was not merely about military matters but about upholding the law, and asked Maj-Gen Endang

¹⁵ In July 2001 the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) was replaced by a less Indonesian-sounding Ulema Consultative Council (Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama), and a provincial Syariat Islam Service (Dinas Syariat Islam) was established the year after. The Dinas received Rp 42 billion from the special educational fund in 2002, and the MPU increased its budget manyfold to Rp 4 billion.

Suwarya to process corruption cases such as the purchase of the printing machine, the purchase of helicopters, and the electrical generators project. Activists who had fled to Jakarta joined forces with anti-corruption groups there such as Indonesia Corruption Watch.¹⁶ Whether moved by these criticisms or not, Maj-Gen Endang Suwaryo interrogated William Taylor, the electrical supplier, in mid-April 2004, and along with him several associated officials. The issue was that some of the generators had been second-hand, and the supplier had paid project money to the bankrupt PT Seulawah NAD director M. Suparno. William Taylor, Usman Budiman and another official were even detained for a while.

Aware he was the real target of these investigations, governor Puteh flew to Jakarta, contacted a famous lawyer, and once more complained to Golkar's Akbar Tanjung. As a result he was invited to meet with an important parliamentary commission on 30 May 2004. Akbar Tanjung and some other politicians said the martial law administrator was going beyond his authority in pursuing Puteh.¹⁷ On 5 May, national parliament advised the government to downgrade martial law in Aceh to a 'civil emergency' that would restore governor Puteh's powers (*Serambi Indonesia* 25-4-2004, 6-5-2004; *Media Indonesia* 2-5-2004; *Kompas* 29-4-2004). President Megawati followed this advice on 19 May 2004. Feeling vindicated, Puteh repeated his earlier assertions to the press that he had always acted within the bounds of the law.¹⁸ Although the corruption cases taken up by the martial law administrator were not dropped, Puteh felt confident enough to strike back with a corruption case of his own against one of the martial law officers. It concerned 17 vehicles, which had been smuggled in as part of a humanitarian assistance shipment. President Megawati ordered the police to investigate (*Serambi Indonesia* 22-6-2004).

In the meantime the critical group did everything in their power to press the government to persist with the corruption allegations against Puteh raised by the martial law administrator. So President Megawati on 27 May 2004 gave the police and the Corruption Eradication Commission (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi, KPK) permission to examine governor Puteh. The allegation only focussed on a smaller problem, namely a project to purchase a Russian MI-2 PLC Rostov helicopter at a price of Rp 12.6 billion.

¹⁶ Others were Gerakan Rakyat Anti Korupsi (Gerak, People's Anti-Corruption Movement) and Persatuan Bantuan Hukum Indonesia (PBHI, Indonesian Legal Aid Association).

¹⁷ According to rumour, governor Puteh's cronies attempted to strike back at Maj-Gen Endang Suwarya by means of a sex scandal. A month earlier Metro TV aired an exclusive interview with a beautiful actress in Bandung who said she had been given a Mercedes with an 'NA' number plate (from Sabang, Aceh) by an important military officer in Aceh.

¹⁸ Exclusive interview with Abdullah Puteh in *Media Indonesia* 2-5-2004 and *Kompas* 20-5-2004.

KPK found that the contractor directly appointed by governor Puteh, Bram Manoppo from PT Putra Pobiagan Mandiri, had marked up the helicopter's price (*Media Indonesia* 2-5-2004; *Serambi Indonesia* 20-7-2004). The electrical generators case proved difficult to bring to court, since the transfer of Rp 3 billion to M. Suparno of PT Seulawah NAD looked like an inter-company loan, although the contractor had only done it under pressure from Puteh. Nevertheless, the KPK investigation was sufficient to make Puteh a suspect, and President Megawati was forced on 20 July 2004 to instruct Abdullah Puteh to hand over his responsibilities to the Coordinating Minister for Politics and Security.¹⁹

Still, Puteh was not out of friends. The Coordinating Minister for Politics at this time was Hari Sabarno, who also held the Interior Ministry, and he had declared a year earlier that Puteh could only be removed by means of the normal legal, administrative and political channels. He viewed the Presidential Instruction as valid only during the investigating phase.²⁰ Akbar Tanjung too (himself also a corruption suspect) tried hard to protect Puteh, saying he should not be relieved of duties until convicted (*Kompas* 21-7-2004; *Serambi Indonesia* 20-7-2004, 21-7-2004).

Yet the law was taking its course. In September 2004 Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who as Coordinating Minister for Politics and Security had listened to Puteh's critics, was popularly elected president on an anti-corruption platform. A special Anti-corruption Court had been established in the last months of Megawati's presidency, part of a package with the Anti-corruption Commission. This now became the main instrument for implementing Yudhoyono's election promises. On 11 April 2005 the court convicted Abdullah Puteh of corruption and handed down a ten-year suspended sentence. At the time of writing (May 2005) it seemed possible the sentence would be overturned on appeal. Puteh's lawyers argued that the Anti-corruption Court had no retroactive powers, while the alleged offence had occurred before the court was established. Nevertheless the decision was widely praised as adding to the credibility of the new government's anticorruption drive.

Conclusion

The sharp and sometimes dirty competition during and after the governor's election in Aceh in 2000 has demonstrated all the characteristics of a conflict among district-based communal patrons for access to the governor's office.

¹⁹ Inpres no. 2/2004.

²⁰ See the explanation of Hari Sabarno (*Serambi Indonesia* 6-7-2004; *Serambi Indonesia* 28-7-2004).

The issue was local resources, not ideology. Where political parties are supposed to act as a single unit, here they were divided up around a series of communal patrons. These patrons maintained personal ties of loyalty and material obligations with their clients. Thus unlike the money politics and thuggery that coloured local politics in some other places, Abdullah Puteh's victory had more to do with his skills of manipulation, which he used to accommodate dissatisfied elements before his election.²¹ After taking office he built alliances with local strongmen in and outside parliament, including with his former rivals, and thus created political stability, at least for a time. He placed around him a set of followers chosen on the basis of personal loyalty rather than merit, so that he sat in the middle of a network of patron-client relations. How parasitic this network was became obvious among others in the PT Seulawah NAD Air and YPAB Nur Raudha scandals. He also built alliances with national elites to protect him against the local attacks that plagued him repeatedly.

Decentralization brought changes in the form of more money from oil and gas and greater independence for parliament, but other structural legacies from the New Order permitted the governor to engage in political criminality. Autonomy has not yet brought more democratic, cleaner and better government to Aceh. The kind of patrimonial politics practised by governor Puteh have been a traditional pattern in Aceh for a long time (Hurgronje 1893-95; Langen 1888; Lombard 1967). The sultan and his *hulubalang* ruled by the use of force, and through personalized cliques in which politics and economics were indivisible. The colonial Dutch introduced administrative renewal once the sultanate was removed, by paying regular salaries to the *hulubalang* and setting up customary courts. But under indirect rule the *hulubalang* continued to exercise their power in traditional ways (M. Isa Sulaiman 1997). Even today, national integration comes less from a unification of economy or culture than from the integration of elites. Communal patrons build alliances with elites at the centre both to gain access to resources and to increase their own legitimacy as local patrons, while central elites need them to gain access to the grassroots.

Of course these bonds of power are not unimportant to the smooth functioning of government, but as long as they remain inadequately balanced by popular participation they become an opportunity for local actors to persist in their destructive patrimonial ways. This in turn increases social inequality and creates unrest. Once a free space for civil society opens up, NGO activists and other reformist movements rise up to fight for the elimination of such patterns. In this context the GAM separatist movement is merely the most extreme form of this negation of an existing pattern of power. The local

²¹ Contrast the Medan mayoral election observed by Vedi Hadiz (Hadiz 2003a).

communal patrons in Aceh are not as wealthy as the big landowning 'bosses' Sidel (1999) describes in the Philippines, nor as crass as the casino, prostitution and marihuana mafia in Thailand (Ockey 1992; Phongpaichit et al. 1998). Aceh's economy is much more controlled by the state and large outside capital, and its culture perhaps somewhat less abrasive. Yet the upwardly mobile bureaucrats, contractors and *ulema* of Aceh build their followings, and their personal wealth, in similar ways and are thus as parasitic as their counterparts elsewhere in Southeast Asia. The big difference with the past is that today such ways of operating are increasingly under challenge from popular democratic forces.