

## **Activists becoming legislative candidates - Tactical, pragmatic or adventurist**

Thursday 28 August 2008, by [HERNOWO Marcellus](#), [Indo Post](#), [Kompas](#) (Date first published: 26 August 2008).

Marcellus Hernowo — As well as celebrities and family members of core political party leaders, the provisional list of legislative candidates that will take part in the 2009 general elections also contains a number of 1998 student movement activists. Is this one of the positive signs coming out of the process of democratisation in Indonesia, particularly in relation to the cadreisation of the national leadership?

1998 activists, who have become legislative candidates, include among others former People's Democratic Party (PRD) chairperson Budiman Sudjatmiko and activists Pius Lustrilanang and Desmond J. Mahesa. The last two were also victims who survived the abduction of pro-democracy activists in 1997-1998.

Their decision to become legislative candidates is as if they want to follow in the footsteps of their colleagues who have already "tasted" a seat in parliament such as Anis Matta (Justice and Prosperity Party) and Nusron Wahid (Golkar Party).

As part of preparations to win a legislative seat, Sudjatmiko has opened offices in Cilacap and Banyumas in Central Java, the electoral districts where he will be competing in the 2009 elections. At both offices he is focusing on communications and meetings with various local social organisations such as youth, farmers and students.

*"Coincidentally I was born and grew up in Cilacap. In 1990-1994, I was also involved in the organisation of plantation workers and farmers in the area so it is relatively easy for me to come to Cilacap and Banyumas, and struggle for the wishes of the residents of these two areas if, in the end I am able to get a seat in the DPR [House of Representatives]", explained Sudjatmiko.*

Sudjatmiko's struggle to become a member of the DPR

began on December 3, 2004 when he along with 51 colleagues in the PRD decided to become members of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P).

*“I became involved in practical politics, in this case a political party, because in order to bring about real reforms it requires political power. If in the past I struggled through demonstrations, now hopefully [it can be] through the DPR”, he said.*

An almost identical view was expressed by the former general secretary of the National Gathering of 1998 Activists (Pena 98), Adian Napitupulu. *“One of the recommendations of the Pena 98 National Meeting in June 2007 was to try to get into the legal political arena in order to ensure that there would be the reforms that had been anticipated. Because, after reflection, up until now our movement has had one particular deficiency, that is we did not have the capacity to implement policies. We are trying to overcome this problem by getting into parliament”,* said Napitupulu.

As a part of implementing this recommendation, continued Napitupulu, members of Pena 98 have now become legislative candidates in 23 provinces, both for the national as well as regional parliaments, with various rankings on legislative candidate lists and with different political parties.

Lustrilanang, one of the victims that survived the abduction of activists in 1997-1998, has also decided to become a legislative candidates for the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra Party) because in his view, political power is required in order to carry out reform.

When asked about leading members of Gerindra, such as former army special forces (Kopassus) commander Prabowo Subianto and former National Intelligence Agency (BIN) deputy chief Muchdi Purwoprandjono [who is now standing trial for the premeditated murder of human rights activist Munir], two former Indonesian military officer who had to relinquish their positions because they were believed to have been responsible for the abduction of activists in 1997-1998, Lustrilanang answered, *“In politics there are no eternal friends or enemies. Besides, their involvement in the case has already been resolved legally”*.

Moreover, continued Lustrilanang, his joining the

Gerindra Party is part of an effort at national reconsolidation, which is an important model that is required for Indonesia to move forward.

*“Among those that now claim to be reformists, there are also many whose bearing is the same as the New Order [regime of former President Suharto], obstinate and authoritarian. So, in the end, it all depends upon the person, and their commitment”,* he asserted.

Prior to joining the Gerindra Party, Lustrilanang once became a member of the PDI-P and the Democratic Renewal Party (PDP), as well as establishing the National Unity Party (PPN).

As well as being motivated by the ideal of carrying out reform, there are also activists who have decided to become legislative candidates because they want to obtain political experience. *“Aside from wanting to learn, there happens to be the opportunity [offered by the] 30 percent quota for women [on legislative candidate lists] so I took advantage of it,”* said the executive director of the Institute for Public Research and Advocacy (Elsam) Agung Putri.

### **Cadreisation**

There are also the consideration within the current democratic environment that it is quite legitimate for an activist to become involved in practical politics, because it is a part of their political right as citizens. Their decision to become legislative candidates is considered important for the cadreisation of the national leadership.

Under an open political system such as exists now, shouting and screaming is not enough to improve the life of the nation, providing correction from outside the system. It requires good and quality people to join in the system in order to improve it from within.

Moreover, they are convinced that Indonesia’s reawakening will take place faster if there is intensive networking and communication between those who are inside and those who are outside the system.

On the other hand however, the inclusion of young activists on legislative candidate list with a track record that is still relatively clean also benefits

the political parties that sponsor them. These activists can provide “cover” for the poor records of these political parties in the past. Moreover, political parties can be seen as “reformist” or to be promising change. Such an image of course, is needed to bolster the number of votes they will receive in the 2009 elections.

The presence of these former activists will also enhance the bargaining position of the political parties concerned if later on they have to form a coalition or cooperate with other political forces.

In the end however, only the future will be able to testify to the real and basic reasons for these former activists becoming legislative candidates.

Is it really for tactical reasons, that is to more effectively struggle to build a better Indonesia? Or is it only for pragmatic reasons, that is because they can't resist the temptation of enjoying the sweat rewards of power? Or, it could also just be part of an effort to fulfil the desire for adventure.

What is clear, is that 1966 activists Soe Hok Gie once deplored the position taken by some of his friends who began to forget their commitment because they were too busy enjoying the comfort of riding in a Holden sedan.

Hopefully such disappointments will not be repeated...

### **1998 activists on legislative candidate electoral lists:**

#### ***Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P)***

- Budiman Sudjatmiko (former People's Democratic Party chairperson)
- Adian Napitupulu (former general secretary of the National Gathering of 1998 Activists)
- Agung Putri (Institute for Public Research and Advocacy executive director)

#### ***Democrat Party***

- Anas Urbaningrum (former Islamic Student Association general chairperson)

#### ***Justice and Prosperity Party (PKS)***

- Rama Pratma (former University of Indonesia Student Senate chairperson)

### ***Star Reform Party (PBR)***

- Dita Indah Sari (labour activist)

### ***Gerindra Party***

- Pius Lustrilanang (victim of the 1997-1998 abductions)

- Desmond J. Mahesa (victim of the 1997-1998 abductions)

\* *From Kompas - August 26, 2008.*

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## **PRD activists who have changed their political clothes**

During the era of Suharto's New Order regime, People's Democratic Party (PRD) activists were very popular. The socialist based organisation was known as a group of young people who resisted Suharto. During the era of reformasi however, they have been unable to find a place for themselves and remain unpopular.

The 1999 general elections were test case for the PRD. As it turned out they failed to garner the 2 percent of the vote required to survive. Since then, the PRD's — which was so popular in the eyes of students devoted to socialism — has gradually dropped out of sight.

In the lead up to the 2009 legislative and presidential elections, they tried to reincarnate themselves with the name Papernas (National Liberation Party of Unity). But, they failed to register themselves with the General Elections Commission. So, where are these prominent party figures that were known as militants during the era of the New Order?

Although they are not taking part in the elections, a number current and former PRD cadre have chosen their own roads to get into parliament. Former PRD leader and the founder of the socialist orientated party, Budiman Sudation, joined the Indonesian

Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). Former PRD general chairperson Yusuf Lakaseng now sits as one of the central board of directors with the Star Reform Party (PBR). Former PRD general secretary Faisol Reza meanwhile picked the National Awakening Party (PKB) as his political vehicle. Just recently Papernas general chairperson Dita Indah Sari also decided to join Lakaseng in the PBR.

The political faucet, which was opened wide after the fall of the Suharto regime, gave birth to a multi-party political system. It is this situation that was one of the reasons that these movement activists changed their political direction to one that was more practical. *"The parliament must be filled with people who are sincere and clean,"* said Lakaseng when contacted by the Indo Post last night.

Lakaseng has come forward as one of the PBR's legislative candidates for the Central Sulawesi electoral district. The man born in the Parigi Moutong regency says that there are several factors that will be advantageous to his candidacy. This includes the fact that there are still no people's representatives from the regency where he was born. *"I have been developing potential voters for the last two years now,"* he added.

Lakaseng denies that there are basic ideological differences between the PRD and the PBR, which is ipso facto an Islamic party. According to Lakaseng, the PBR has a socialist-religious base. In addition to this, under the leadership of PBR general chairperson Bursah Zarnubi, the PBR has provided extensive opportunities to young people. *"Young people like me have been given the opportunity to become members of the central board of directors,"* he said.

Another PRD activist who has joined an established political party is Aan Rusdianto (34). A victim of the 1998 abductions of student activities, he chose the PKB as his political vehicle. The man born in Ciamis, West Java, and drop out from the University of Diponegoro says that his reason for joining the PKB was because of Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, an activist and PKB legislator known as a defender of women's rights. But, soon after the grassroots membership based party split, she was dismissed from her position as the deputy secretary of the Jakarta Special Province regional leadership board.

As an "*alumni of the 1998 abductions*", said Rusdianto, he is not alone in the PKB. There are also other victims of the abductions such as former PRD leader Faisol Reza. In an email sent to the *Indo Post* (the *Java Post* Group) last week, he claimed that he is still a member of the PKB's board of directors in Parung (Bogor). Earlier, news reports appeared saying that Reza had joined the Gerindra Party (Great Indonesia Movement Party, established former army special forces chief Prabowo Subianto). "*It is not true that I have joined the Gerindra Party*", he wrote.

But, why then did Dita Sari choose to join the PBR, an Islamic based party? Sari does not have a problem with this, because many of the PBR's programs are in accord with her idealism. Among others this includes economic self-sufficiency that is not dependent upon foreigners, the option of abolishing the foreign debt and economic development in rural areas as a priority.

Sudjatmiko, who has not been active with the PRD since 2001, said that the spirit of reform in a democratic framework still requires parties as political vehicles. "*Idealistic struggles cannot be carried out from outside the fence*," he asserted.

Like Sari and Lakaseng with the PBR, or Reza joining the PKB, Sudjatmiko also has a justification for joining the PDI-P. "*The PDI-P is taking up the issues of nationalism, pluralism and populism, it seemed, to be closest to my vision*", he said.  
(cak/nas/pri/tof)

\* *From Indo Post - August 7, 2008.*

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**P.S.**

\* Translated by James Balowski.