

## First day of campaign receives lackluster reception

The Jakarta Post  
Jakarta

Compared to the candid public reception they received during the 1999 general elections, it will be much tougher for the 24 political parties contesting the April 5 legislative election to win voters to believe their campaign programs.

This was clearly indicated by the attitudes of people toward participants in the Jakarta parade and political rallies across the country that marked the first day of the 22-day campaign period.

The majority of those same politicians who promised prosperity and justice for the country in 1999 are expected to deliver the same promises again.

Many people along Jl. Thamrin, Jl. Sudirman, Jl. Gatot Subroto and other major thoroughfares in the capital seemed indifferent to parade participants as they waved at the crowds or tried to greet onlookers.

On Thursday morning, Jakarta Governor Sutiyoso saw off the parade at City Hall, which included representatives and supporters of the political parties as well as the 38 candidates for the Jakarta Regional Representatives Council.

No enthusiastic crowd of onlookers lined the main downtown street to clap and cheer on as the parties' supporters gestured and shouted out their party slogans, unlike the 1999 campaigns.

"What else can they say, except that they are the right parties to lead this country," an Atmajaya University lecturer said wryly.

A group of onlookers on Jl. Sudirman were dismayed as campaigners only gave away stickers, flyers and pamphlets, accompanied by the blaring

sound of dangdut songs.

When a pick-up truck delivering half a dozen new motorcycles passed by, the crowd told the campaigners: "If your party gave us motorcycles, we would surely vote for you."

Traffic in the capital and in several major cities were also lighter than the expected jams, as many had decided to stay at home in case the rallies turned violent.

In Medan, North Sumatra, parties had yet to deploy supporters for the first day of streetside campaigns, as they had not yet finished placing party paraphernalia in every corner of the city. They are set to hit the streets on Friday.

Party supporters in Manado, North Sulawesi, were disappointed on the first campaign day because of heavy rains, and the planned joint parade was called off.

In Samarinda, East Kalimantan, no street parades were visible, as only minor parties were scheduled for the first campaign day.

In Yogyakarta, several parties had decided to opt out of a street campaign, as they had inadequate funds to rally supporters.

The calm situation was also prevalent in Mataram, Nusa Tenggara Barat, as parties had not amassed supporters for a parade.

In conflict-torn Ambon, Maluku, the day was also relatively calm, despite a small incident involving the supporters of the Pioneers Party (Partai Pelopor) and the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P).

In Jayapura, Papua, supporters of PNI Marhaenisme and the National Awakening Party (PKB) were nearly involved in a brawl over campaign spots at the Bintang Mas Arena.

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JPI/Arief Suwardiman

**PROMISING START:** The Hotel Indonesia traffic circle in Central Jakarta is awash with colorful floats as supporters of political parties hold a joint rally. The street campaigners honored their pledge on Thursday, the first day of the campaign period, for peaceful rallies ahead of the elections. The campaign received somewhat cool reception from the general public.

## Susilo quits after open rift with Megawati

The Jakarta Post  
Jakarta/Surabaya

The row between President Megawati Soekarnoputri and Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono culminated on Thursday with Susilo's resignation from the

Cabinet.

"After long and deep consideration, I wrote a letter to the President a moment ago in which I asked permission to resign from the Cabinet," Susilo said during a press conference at his office.

Susilo's resignation, which came on the first day of campaigning for the April 5 leg-

islative election, was the first resignation from Megawati's "Rainbow Cabinet".

A well-placed official told *The Jakarta Post* on Thursday evening that Megawati had accepted Susilo's resignation and was preparing a presidential decree on the matter. "But she has yet to decide who will fill the vacant position," said the high-ranking official, adding that the decree may be completed as early as Friday.

Megawati herself showed little surprise to Susilo's resignation. Wearing a big smile, Megawati waved Susilo's resignation letter to journalists as she entered her official car to leave the State Palace.

"The President was informed as soon as I heard about the resignation, but she did not say anything upon hearing the news," State Secretary Bambang Kesowo said.

The rift between Megawati and Susilo came to a head on Monday when Susilo alleged the President had sidelined him in the Cabinet.

He wrote a letter to the President asking her to clarify his duties in the Cabinet and seeking a meeting.

Susilo said on Thursday he had attempted in vain several times to set up a meeting "to discuss the problems outlined in my letter."

"My relationship with the President was disrupted. It was becoming difficult to keep doing my job properly," he said.

He said he had wanted the President to explain "whether the authority and responsibility (of my office) still lies with me or whether (she) will take

over and supervise those officials directly".

Susilo also said that he would remain in his post until Megawati had appointed a replacement but would not take any strategic decisions.

Susilo, 52, has set his eyes on the upcoming presidential election, with the latest surveys showing his support has risen significantly in the past few months.

Two other ministers — Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Jusuf Kalla and Minister of Justice and Human Rights Yusril Ihza Mahendra — also have presidential ambitions, but Susilo is seen as Megawati's strongest challenger.

The Democratic Party, a small party that Susilo helped found in September 2001, has said it will back him for the presidency.

Asked whether he was ready to run for president, Susilo replied: "Yes, I am ready to run for the presidential post. As of today, the Democratic Party supports me, but I am ready to join forces with other political parties if they wish."

Later in the day, Susilo held a closed-door meeting with former president Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid, who has been nominated as a presidential candidate by the National Awakening Party (PKB).

People's Consultative Assembly Speaker Amien Rais welcomed Susilo's decision to step down, saying that resigning was better than remaining in the Cabinet without a role.

Comment — Page 2

## Elections may cause price hikes: Association

Urip Hudiono  
and Abdul Khalik

The Jakarta Post  
Jakarta

The Indonesian Food and Beverages Association (GAPMI) has warned the government that rallies during the current campaign period for parties contesting the general election could disrupt the distribution of basic food items in the country and hike their prices.

However, a farmers association dismissed the fear saying that rather than increasing, the falling prices of several food products would continue to decline.

GAPMI urged the government, particularly the office of the Coordinating Minister for the Economy, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Industry and Trade, to launch a concerted effort with other related ministries to anticipate such a possibility.

"The government must ensure that distribution trucks are not reluctant to pass through their usual routes, by among other methods, scheduling them so that they do not run into any campaign rallies," said GAPMI's chairman Thomas Darmawan on Thursday after a morning discussion between the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Kadin) and the office of the State Minister of the Environment.

Thomas, who is also the head of the chamber's committee for product development and marketing, further suggested that the government immediately prepare alternative distribution routes in case the usual routes were congested due to rallies.

"The government should effectively utilize all existing railways and seaports for that purpose," he said.

And though price hikes of 5 percent to 10 percent were probably still tolerable, Thomas said, hikes of more than 25 percent, particularly in the price of rice and grains, would obviously raise concern. He said that, in that case, prompt market intervention would be required from the government.

However, Siswono Yudhohusodo, the chairman of the Indonesian Farmers Association (HKTI) downplayed the warning, arguing that the prices of many products were now falling due to successful harvests and abundant supply, and the trend would continue in the coming days.

"Products from farmers, such as rice, are now very cheap because of an overstock due to the recent harvest. Other product's prices, such as those of chicken and meat, are also declining because of oversupply."

"So, there is no reason to worry about increasing prices during the elections," said Siswono.

## 24 HOURS

**Bremer sees threat of Iraq attacks next month:** Attacks in Iraq will increase as the date for a U.S. handover of power nears and there are fears a religious event next month could be a target, the U.S.'s top administrator in Iraq said on Thursday. "We will have more of a threat from terrorism as we go toward the June 30 handover because the terrorists clearly understand that once there is democracy here, there is no pretext for attacking any more," Paul Bremer said during a visit to the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division in western Iraq. — Reuters

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### Megawati and Susilo: a falling out timeline

- Feb. 18 - President Megawati Soekarnoputri holds a cabinet meeting to draft government regulations on the campaign for state officials and asks her ministers whether they will run for presidency.
- Feb. 22 - Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono goes on a week-long visit to China.
- Feb. 25 - Megawati signs Government Regulation No. 9/2004 on campaigning for state officials, and instructs officials in Susilo's ministerial office to monitor election preparations, without his knowledge.
- Feb. 28 - On arrival from China, Susilo calls his subordinates in Aceh and discovers Megawati's instructions.
- March 1 - Susilo tells the media he is being excluded from cabinet meetings on political and security affairs.
- March 2 - Megawati's husband Taufik Kiemas says Susilo's reaction is childish.
- March 9 - Susilo sends a letter to Megawati, asking for clarity of his job description and a meeting with her.
- March 10 - Megawati refuses to respond to Susilo's letter.
- March 11 - Susilo tenders his resignation.

Photo: JPR/Beno Weharmans

## Rush-hour blasts kill over 180 in Madrid

Agencies  
Madrid

At least 186 people were killed and some 1,000 injured in a series of rush hour bomb blasts which ripped through three Madrid railway stations on Thursday in the worst ever terror attack on Spanish soil.

The blasts occurred within minutes of each other starting from 7:30 a.m. (1:30 p.m. in Jakarta) as morning commuters arrived at the three stations.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attacks across the Spanish

capital three days before a national election, but Spain insisted the Basque separatist group ETA was to blame.

Spain's Interior Minister Angel Acebes said 13 bombs had been placed in stations and trains around Madrid, of which 10 had gone off within minutes of each other, adding there was "no doubt" the separatist Basque group ETA, which is on the U.S. list of banned terror organizations, was behind the attack.

But the leader of the banned Basque Batasuna political party denied the charge and condemned the attacks, which judicial

sources at the scene said killed more than 186 people and injured more than 1,000.

Instead Batasuna party leader Arnaldo Otegi highlighted Spain's role in the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq which has already drawn warnings of revenge attacks from the al-Qaeda terror network and blamed "Arab resistance".

World leaders condemned the coordinated blasts as an attack on democracy coming just three days before Sunday's general elections, and urged a joint stand to fight against terrorism.

Indonesia, which has been

hit by several terrorist attacks over the past four years, has condemned the blasts at three train stations in Madrid and said they indicated the need for an international effort to fight terrorism.

"We are shocked and deeply saddened by news of the horrific terrorist attacks in Spain on Thursday morning. We strongly condemn this attack and express our deepest sympathy to the government and people of Spain," foreign ministry spokesman Marty Natalegawa said in a statement sent to *The Jakarta Post* on Thursday.

"The attacks provide fur-

ther proof of the multiple and diverse source of terrorism as a global menace which may strike anywhere at anytime and the need for all nations to cooperate in overcoming it," he said.

Commuters faced scenes of carnage with bodies strewn across tracks and in the wreckage of the four trains targeted by the blasts at the Atocha station in central Madrid, as well as the suburban Santa Eugenia and Pozo stations. Three more bombs were detonated in controlled explosions by the Spanish authorities, Acebes said.

Reaction — Page 12

