

Program 3 - Thinking Outside the Capital

After decades of highly centralised authoritarian rule in Indonesia, power and resources have been devolved to local government to try to head off secessionist claims.

However, the implementation of Indonesia's regional autonomy laws has been beset by all sorts of problems that have fuelled suspicion about the Jakarta's commitment to making devolution work.

The tension between democratic reformers who believe that being more inclusive of the regions is the only way to pre-empt disintegration of the state and those nationalists who fear any lessening of control will only lead to its break-up is at the heart of debates over governance in Indonesia.

JOHN WESTLAND:

Hello. I'm John Westland and welcome to 'SHARING POWER - THE TIES THAT BIND'.

Today, 'THINKING BEYOND THE CAPITAL'.

It's something of a truism that a nation's capital city doesn't necessarily reflect the life-styles or economic realities of the rest of the country. In the Philippines, people in the regions often refer disparagingly to 'Imperial Manila', while Indonesians in out-lying provinces are keen to run their own affairs after decades of highly centralised control from Jakarta.

BIVITRI SUSANTI:

To have voices from different provinces is very important especially right now because people outside Jakarta have been through this repressive moment during the New Order regime where the development was only centralised in Jakarta and Java island - so it is now their turn to be heard.

JOHN WESTLAND:

Bivitri Susanti from the Centre for Indonesian Law and Policy Studies.

And the voices from outside Jakarta have been loud enough to be heard in the capital. Since the fall of the Suharto regime, the Central Government has offered the regions greater political and economic autonomy.

While Jakarta continues to collect national property and corporate taxes - under the 1999 regional autonomy laws - the Centre gives back a more generous share of revenue to local government.

However, instead of devolving power to existing Provincial Governments, the autonomy laws have put more power into the hands of local officials at the district or 'kabupaten' level of government - a move that's created confusion and more suspicion ...

BIVITRI SUSANTI:

Indonesia has more than 300 kabupatens and we now have about 30 provinces, and I think, yes, it is more difficult to have kabupaten have their own autonomy than in a province because it's too small a jurisdiction. There is a rumour that if they give too much autonomy to the province then they can demand their independence because by giving more power to the province they can become more powerful, they can collect their resources and then in a few years, they can demand independence. So it's safer to give autonomy to the kabupaten which is relatively smaller so it can be easily controlled by the Central government.

DR RICHARD CHAUVEL:

Habibie's decision to devolve to the district level of administration or the kabupaten level was devised I think to avoid the risks of promoting separatist tensions. The substantial separatist threats were in Irian Jaya, West Papua and Aceh and they were essentially provincial based movements. It was thought in Jakarta that if you devolve authority to the sub-provincial level that that would not be giving support to those separatist movements.

JOHN WESTLAND:

Dr Richard Chauvel from Melbourne's Victoria University.

When Interim President B. J. Habibie introduced the 1999 regional autonomy laws that by-passed existing provincial governments in favour of the smaller kabupaten or district administrations - not only did it fail to improve relations between the Centre and the regions but it actually destabilised relationships between Indonesia's three tiers of government.

DR RICHARD CHAUVEL:

The difficulty with that legislation as it has been implemented since the beginning of 2001 has been the disruptive effect on the hierarchy of administration within provinces. There's been lots of commentary in the Indonesian press of the heads of the district level of administration saying we don't want to cooperate with the governor anymore, you know we've got the money, we've got the authority, we don't need to pay any deference to the governor, who in formal hierarchical terms is further up the hierarchy. That hierarchy within provinces I think has to be restored, I think that that revision of the autonomy legislation has to be done in such a way that it is seen not to be taking power back to Jakarta, but as a rethinking of the distribution of power between provinces, and districts within those provinces.

JOHN WESTLAND:

The Central Government's decentralisation process has created a whole new raft of administrative problems - not least - the way that it's decentralised official corruption yet at the same time made it more difficult for the Centre to tackle.

Eleven months after regional autonomy was introduced, the Head of the National Parliament's Budget Committee accused local officials of embezzling up to forty per cent of a six-billion-dollar central government fund intended for regional emergencies. Jakob Tobing is a Member of Indonesia's national parliament.

JAKOB TOBING:

Frankly-speaking I was shocked with that report and it's good that we know it immediately so we'll have time to deal with it. Some areas all of a sudden have an abundance of money, you know, to manage and they just spend it on other budgets that's not directly linked to development, like purchasing of luxurious cars and those kind of things. According to the report they're smart enough, they're clever enough, they have it justified legally to pick up the purchases. But now with this experience we'll put more parameters and those kind of regulations to prevent it from happening again, yeah.

JOHN WESTLAND:

Jakob Tobing is also Chairman of an Ad Hoc Committee that's been working to amend Indonesia's 1945 Constitution to reflect the country's democratisation and new power-sharing arrangements.

JAKOB TOBING:

With the amendment we also provide the system with an empowered supreme auditing body. At present, they only have an office in Jakarta, in the capital city, but with the provision in the constitution they will have an office in the provinces and they will supervise and audit all these expenses on how to manage the assets of the state down to the regional level. And the findings will be provided both to the regional house and also to the House of Representatives. So at the end of the day, we'll have a kind of constitutional court with the competence to decide on the disputes and on the competence of these government levels.

JOHN WESTLAND:

While Jakarta's politicians are busy warning the regions that autonomy brings not only new freedoms but new responsibilities, Indonesia's two most rebellious provinces, Aceh and West Papua, continue to be suspicious of politicians bearing gifts.

Both have been offered Special Autonomy Packages that include far greater autonomy for each Provincial Government and far more generous revenue-sharing arrangements than for other regions. While Aceh and Irian Jaya used to receive just one per cent of state revenue generated from mining, oil and gas projects, they are now promised 70 per cent from oil and gas revenues and 80 per cent from mining, forestry and fishing.

However, 'special autonomy' has not dispelled the widely held view that resource revenues from sparsely populated but resource-rich regions like Aceh and West Papua have been syphoned off by Jakarta to support Indonesia's most populous island - Java.

Dr Nazaruddin Sjamsuddin, is an Acehnese Professor of Political Science at the University of Indonesia ...

DR NAZARUDDIN SJAMSUDDIN:

Indonesian politics and Indonesian economic life, especially, is being controlled by Java and in particular by the Javanese. The fact is that most of Indonesia's national resources are located in those provinces lacking population, while Java is very densely populated. So the government, which is controlled by Javanese politicians, they're thinking about how to protect the political and economic interests of Java Island.

JOHN WESTLAND:

Java's economic growth did out-strip the rest of the country until the Asian financial Crisis hit Indonesia and precipitated the fall of the New Order regime in 1998.

Dr. Ann Booth is an economist from the London School of Oriental and African Studies.

DR ANN BOOTH:

Beginning really in the latter part of the 1980's Indonesia did manage to develop with surprising rapidity successful export oriented industries based on products such as textiles, garments, footwear, electronic products and so on. Much of this manufacturing was based in Java, the infrastructure, of course, was in Java, the ports were in Java and of course the abundant supplies of cheap labour were centred also in Java. And so you had the rapid development of large industrial complexes around the main port cities, particularly of Jakarta and Surabaya. Now of course the people in the outer islands looked at these developments, inevitably, with some degree of jealousy because they saw not just the industry, but also the modern services, financial services, developing rapidly in Java and I think this aggravated the feeling that they were being left behind, that they were simply regions which the centre exploited, when it suited them, for their natural resources, but the centre was not prepared to develop them. And, inevitably, this did cause resentment.

JOHN WESTLAND:

Melkianus Bleskadith, leader of the West Papua University Student's Union reflects West Papuans' belief that they're not seeing the sort of development that the Province's resource wealth should make possible.

MELKIANUS BLESKADITH:

It's impossible for autonomy to build in West Papua, you know in West Papua we are a forest but Indonesian people sell our food, our wood. We have a sea but the Indonesian people they sell our fish. And you know a lot of our part of the region, its economy is being dominated by Indonesian people.

DR ANN BOOTH:

The problem I think can be illustrated best if we take one example, the case of Irian Jaya, the province in eastern Indonesian which of course remained under Dutch control until the early 1960's, was liberated by the Indonesian army in the mid-1960's and after a UN supervised referendum, which many people feel was flawed, it became a province of Indonesia. Irian Jaya was, and continues to be, very underdeveloped in terms of infrastructure, education, public health facilities and so on, but of course it is a very wealthy province, it has a very large mining sector and also substantial potential, particularly in the oil and gas sector. So you had in the case of Irian Jaya this contrast between a relatively wealthy province with a high per capita GDP, but also with very high poverty levels and very low levels of human development as are conventionally measured looking at indicators such as school enrolment ratios, literacy rates, infant mortality rates and so on. And I think this contrast between the province's wealth and its very low level of development led inevitably to substantial resentment, you were already getting quite vocal criticism in the early 1990's, and of course after the departure of Suharto this criticism has become a lot more vocal and of course you're getting now quite a lot of talk about secession.

JOHN WESTLAND:

But while the Central Government in Jakarta is working on what they hope will be a political settlement in Aceh and West Papua, Indonesian military actions on the ground seem only designed to win more recruits to the separatists' cause. Though that's not the way parliamentarian, Jakob Tobing sees it...

JAKOB TOBING:

I think on the more practical level we encourage the government to have more dialogue with these people in those regions, but on the other hand we'd like to have the government deal firmly with those elements which just neglect all of these goodwill efforts done by the government. So I think

we'll have this both simultaneously but of course the dialogue and the more just and proper way of allocating budgets is the biggest stick of our effort.

JOHN WESTLAND:

Jakarta's position represents something of a Catch 22 - any political solution to the conflicts in Aceh and West Papua rests on the Acehnese and Papuans ceasing to express their aspirations for independence.

At the end of 2000 five leaders of the Papua Presidium Council including its President, pro-independence Chief, Theys Eluay were arrested on charges of treason. A year later Theys Eluay was murdered creating further suspicion and a climate of fear in the Province.

Dr Benny Giay teaches at a theological training college in the West Papuan capital, Jayapura and was also a member of the Papuan Presidium Council. He's currently the Chair of the Board of the Human Rights group, ELSHAM....

DR BENNY GIAY:

One of the things that we can see is the fear among Papuans because of the rumour which has been prevalent that some aged, religious and political elites either church leaders or political independence movement leaders would be killed just like Theys Eluay. They feel like they're being intimidated or terrorised. So there is an argument which is very strong in West Papua that it's the military who is behind this assassination because they want Papuans to accept the special autonomy package because if Papuans accept it, then their role in West Papua will be somehow diminished. That, maybe somehow, they will be kicked out or lose their influence...yeah.

JOHN WESTLAND:

The pattern of repression in both Aceh and West Papua has renewed concerns that Indonesia is returning to Suharto-like methods to deal with dissent.

Dr Richard Chauvel again....

DR RICHARD CHAUVEL:

I think the problems are in fact quite similar at both ends of the archipelago. I think one of the greatest difficulties that the Indonesian government confronts if we take the example of West Papua, which doesn't pose the same military threat as the independence groups do in Aceh, but in West Papua, Jakarta's policies, are in a sense nearly self-defeating. On one hand, they're offering special autonomy and in many respects it's quite generous autonomy that's being given. Jakarta has had to bite a number of very difficult sorts of ideological bullets to pass that piece of legislation, it's had to recognise flags, other national symbols, it's permitted an Upper House to be created, which is going

to enshrine Papuan dominance. So there's lots of concessions. Unfortunately that policy has been combined with a return to the cycles of repression and alienation, the patterns of violence that have developed since the late Theys Eluay and his four colleagues in the Presidium were arrested. They really represent a return to Suharto-like methods of governance in West Papua, are really incompatible with offers of special autonomy. So Jakarta has, in a sense, a golden opportunity, it is running enormous risks, it can destroy any chance of special autonomy fulfilling its political objective of representing an alternative to independence, if those measures are continued it will merely confirm what most Papuans believe that Jakarta cannot be trusted.

JOHN WESTLAND:

While the Indonesian Government experiments with power sharing arrangements they hope will put an end to secessionist claims - the government of neighbouring Papua New Guinea has brokered a Peace Agreement with the Bougainville secessionist movement that seems to offer a way forward for all parties in a war that has cost the lives of some 20 thousand people.

The Peace Agreement includes the creation of a Bougainville Government with a high degree of autonomy AND the promise of a referendum on the question of independence - in ten to fifteen years.

Joseph Kabui is President of the Bougainville Peoples Congress ...

JOSEPH KABUI:

It may so happen that people may say we are happy to feel as if we are a nation within a nation. If the majority say OK let's go for our independence, so be it, if the majority of people say no, let us remain as an autonomous government within the frame of a Papua New Guinea, so be it.

JOHN WESTLAND:

And in our next program: NATIONS WITHIN NATIONS we'll take a closer look at power sharing arrangements in Papua New Guinea.

Radio Australia's series, SHARING POWER - THE TIES THAT BIND is produced by Sue Slamen, Technical Production by Ryan Egan and Academic Advice, Dr Richard Chauvel from Melbourne's Victoria University.

Hope you can join me - John Westland - here on Radio Australia - next week.