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Most of the Third World countries who experienced the process of decolonisation and were normally constituted of diverse ethnic peoples within their superimposed boundaries are today facing the challenge of binding together the various regions into nation-state and simultaneously, leading towards a well-functioning and interdependent whole. To ensure the continued existence of nation-state through integration of diverse groups and peoples as one politico-geographic entity and to bestow stability and economic development, there is the need for sustained cohesive forces. There are chances that human and material resources, without some measure of integration, must have to be diverted toward coping with the centrifugal forces of regional disaffection or rebellion, which otherwise might have been utilised for raising the living standards of its people.

Particularly for vast countries like Indonesia with hundreds of ethnic groups, languages, greater diversity and greater distances, the challenge of national integration is the biggest and most serious. Often economic prosperity and the success story of material progress cushions up such centrifugal tendencies and stands up against as a risk for probable future uncertainties. Following the Asian economic crisis, Indonesia has been bleeding profusely as a weak and vulnerable nation-state.

Indeed, what is at stake beyond the social, political and economic challenges faced by the country is the very survival of Indonesia as a nation and as a unitary state confronted by recurrent conflicts among ethnic and religious groups in various
provinces, some of which are demanding sovereign independence from the republic. Already the loss of East Timor has been a terrible blow to Indonesia. But whether or not the government recognised it as such, the loss of East Timor was actually a net gain for Indonesia as a whole, because it could only help sustain the latter's two fragile recoveries – from authoritarian rule and from economic recession.

Between mid-1997 and mid-1998, Indonesia's per capita GDP shrank by 16.2 per cent. Jakarta could ill afford to continue its two-decade-long military repression of the East Timorese which was draining Indonesian economy. Not only that, it was also bleeding wound and a great embarrassment for Indonesia for the international community had never recognised East Timor as part of Indonesia. However, bloody and belated the separation was, relinquishing the territory removed an impediment to crucial political and financial support from foreign donors and lenders sensitive to human rights. Indonesia's East Timor adventure was a bad investment in true sense.

Today, when world's fourth most populous nation is struggling hard to contain the 'domino effect' of the East Timorese secession, analysts are busy doing a post-mortem of Indonesian nationalism and its post-colonial policy towards national integration in order to find out what went wrong. The first aspect which is often ignored is the fact that Indonesia's form of nation-state has never been 'final'. The interaction between the formation of nation-state and regions, as well as social groupings, for example, is still in a reconstructive process.

It is true that the concept of nation-state which was shaped by the new dynamics in the international economic and political relations hundreds of years ago has been considered as the proper
unit for political and economic reasons. But the process of state-formation has been followed by the process of homogenisation in the fields of administration, national symbols, as well as social, economic and political structures. This process of homogenisation has also meant the marginalisation of other social structures based on locality, ethnicity and social groupings. These other social structures become secondary in importance, subdued, and sometimes considered illegitimate at the national level.

This tendency would not have created so many problems if the nation-state was believed to provide something positive that individual groups could not attain. It means that there must be elements of trust and capability perceived by these groups. Once the nation-state is strengthened, however, the interaction process between the national government and these groups should not be halted and considered as complete. It is precisely because of the fact that homogenised structures could not really accommodate the dynamics of 'others'. It goes without saying that the homogenised structures were often used to serve the self-interest of certain groups.

The centralised state inherited since colonial time limits Indonesia's horizon in the above aspect. It does not give a good lesson of the need to continuously reconstruct the structure of communication between the central government and its regions. Moreover, the experience of centralisation has made Indonesia's thinking about central-regional relations somewhat limited. For example, ideas on autonomy only accommodate the economic and administrative governance aspects. A snowballing in demands posed by other regions is thus not surprising.
Another important aspect ignored in the public discourse concerns the state's existence, direction and capability. Along with the fall of Suharto, there had been considerable reconstruction of state institutions. The state, for example, no longer dominated societal groups. Further, what is happening now is the political penetration by various political groups into the state. The direction of politics, therefore, depends on the power play between these groups. This is a classic case of state having lost its autonomy.

Today, when Indonesia as a nation is facing the crisis of trust in the state, there is a growing realisation that it is time to abolish pseudouniformity. Historically observing, it was Ernest Renan's idea of nationhood which had influenced the first generation Indonesian freedom fighters, particularly Sukarno. Renan's was simply a speculative, metaphysical construct rather than a theory based on empirical evidence to explain or to understand the phenomenon of nationhood. In his speech on the introduction of *Pancasila* on June 1, 1945, Sukarno defined a nation by adopting Renan's views, which emphasise that the people felt themselves to be united and thus wanted to come under one umbrella called nation. Sukarno also quoted Otto Bauer who defines a nation as a community of character, which has grown out of a community of shared experience.

Indonesia was promoted in line with Renan's conceptualisation of the nation as 'a soul, spiritual principle, where two things, which in reality are one, make up that soul, that spiritual principle – one is the possession in common of a rich inheritance of memories, the other is the actual desire of living together'. But the reality was not necessarily like that in preindependent Indonesia. The fact is that for a period of over a century, intermittent but isolated revolts by different regions of the
then Netherlands East Indies against Dutch colonial rule were never successful. Even grounds for questioning the basis of Indonesian unity were laid in the immediate aftermath of the war of independence, when a secessionist rebellion broke out in the South Moluccas, a Christian-dominated region which had traditionally been closely associated with the Dutch and which feared domination by Muslim Java. Also, certain other regions demanding secession became a constant headache for the infant republic. This process persisted till the present time.

Though a nation, Indonesia had not been a nation-state throughout history, except twice, namely, in the form of Srivijaya and the Majapahit kingdoms in centuries past – a reference that used to scare Indonesia's neighbours during Sukarno's aggressive policy of confrontation against Malaysia in the early 1960s. Indeed, Republic of Indonesia as a nation was often guided by the 'common enemy' syndrome which helped it remain together.

Under the 30-year rule of the New Order, racial and religious plurality was deemed a latent danger to the unity and integrity of the nation. This belief heavily marked the public policies of New Order government. Diversity was often wrongly used as a pretext for justifying repressive or autocratic policies. The whole monolithic power structure of the Suharto regime was founded primarily on the strategic ground of fear management – an excessive sense of 'fear' toward political disintegration from out of ethnic and religious tension, which, it seems, was intentionally nurtured and carefully incubated within the untutored minds of the Indonesian people. This weapon was wielded to the advantage of the New Order.

The policy of pseudouniformity was superficially introduced, rather imposed upon the populace. Ethnic cultures, worse still,
even the nation’s tastes in fashion and food, were forced to unite or were slowly choked off under the cultural politics widely known as the ‘National Culture’, which never materialised, rather became a misleading blanket term to be debated later during the post-Suharto era.

If anything which was really something for people to entertain themselves with, it was no more than a peripheral symbolic convergence of otherwise conflicting cultures with an unexpectedly beautiful compromise in the use of Bahasa Indonesia as a unifying tongue. The nation’s diverse ideological views and visions were forced into uniformity through such nationwide brainwashing projects such as the Penataran P4 (the intensive Pancasila course). Due to the excessive glorification of such pseudouniformity, hypocritical and cosmetic compromises occurred at all levels of Indonesian social, cultural, political and economic life. Such expressions as ‘Watch out for the influence of alien cultures unsuitable to our own’, ‘Watch out for the latent danger of PKI (the now-defunct Indonesian Communist Party)’ and ‘Watch out for the intellectual protagonists behind riots’, were clear examples of the utter rejection of diversity. Like scraping a life-endangering tumour, the three decades of New Order regime squeezed the essence of plurality in a systematic manner, which otherwise has been so unique a characteristic to Indonesian way of life.

In addition, the New Order regime’s official programme of transmigration had serious complaints which shifted hundred of thousands of Javanese, Madurese and Balinese to supposedly less crowded other regions. In the process, traditional users of land were often displaced and the cultural complexion of many regions was utterly transformed. There has also been extensive migration without government sponsorship, so that Buginese and Ambonese,
for instance, are felt as an intrusive, dominating force in many parts of eastern Indonesia. In common with most peoples, Indonesians of each ethnic group harbour a rich variety of prejudices against neighbouring groups: Minangkabau are said to be mean and clever, Sundanese insincere and superficial, Madurese are looking for a fight, and so on. For those who want to find it - the basis for serious ethnic antagonism - seems clearly to be present. Above all, these resentments have been exacerbated by economic imbalances and differences.

The break-up of Soviet Union and Yugoslavia after 1991 turned the disintegration of Indonesia from a point of imaginative speculation into a serious topic of discussion. But considering two important points one can assume that Indonesia's unity, after the separation of East Timor, is not so serious a risk as is pondered over. First, Indonesia, unlike Yugoslavia and other successful secessions and separations of the last five decades, except Bosnia's partition, lacks appropriate long-established interregional borders along which the country might be torn apart. Usually borders have a dominant effect on nationalist imagination.

More often than not, a clear system of ethno-religious classification contributes to secessionist demands, which is absent in case of Indonesia. Indonesia has no formal system for classifying its indigenous people, and indeed it refuses to apply the United Nations category of 'indigenous' to the small tribal groups who would normally be entitled to it. Terms like Batak and Malay are inherently ambiguous and therefore difficult to turn into a political symbol. Modern Indonesian culture, for all its Javanese elements, is far from identical with Javanese culture, and it exercises a strong solvent power especially through the media and the educational system. Although ethno-religious antagonism between Islam and
Christianity has been on rise, but given the high degree of inter-penetration between Muslim and Christian communities, there is no immediate likelihood that this antagonism will translate into separatist tendencies.

Although Aceh and Irian Jaya seem slightly exceptional to the above factors, but other practical constraints may make the task of disintegration quite difficult. Most important is the lack of a significant political agenda within Indonesia which would support separatism. Also, external sympathy as against Indonesia's balkanisation is quite strong, which will only help regional economic and political disturbance. It also risks huge human and material loss as was seen in case of East Timor. Indonesia's giant eastern neighbour too cannot always risk its bilateral relation jeopardising trade investments and huge market benefits on Indonesian soil.

It is often said God helps those who help themselves. In the present era of reform, extensive attention should be given to measures which lead toward the creation of Indonesianised pluralism, putting a full-stop to New Order regime's policy of pseudouniformity. This pluralism should be conducive to harmonious multiethnic and multireligious life in all walks of life. One of the most realistic ways to accomplish this is by securing as much breathing space as possible for the entire populace to express their idiosyncratic plurality both freely and creatively.

Instead of blaming others, Indonesia must self-analyse in itself as there are some hard lessons to be learnt from the East Timor debacle. Firstly, whatever the case the Indonesian nation and the public should not be exploited for the misplaced nationalism and jingoism of the military and political elite which are simply
excuses for the misdeeds and wrong doings in their own ranks. Many among these very people had damaged Indonesia’s integrity, pride and self-respect by sowing discord and violence in society through the exploitation of such sentiments. It is high time Indonesia must cultivate the seed of positive nationalism based on economic development and social harmony. That will automatically improve Indonesia’s reputation in the world which is currently at its lowest.

A healthy economic growth with balanced revenue sharing between centre and various regions will silence the echo of secessionism. Decentralisation can be adopted, with a pseudo-federal system at least tried. Centripetal diplomacy, it is estimated, can work. Regional demands must be located within the wider framework of relationships between the central government and the regions. It should not be based on emotional consideration. The central government in the effort to maintain country’s unity absolutely needs to convince the regions about the positive outcomes being together. The people must be convinced that the government is capable and reliable.

Indonesia has to be more cautious towards preserving human rights and improving civil control of the military. For certain regions demanding separation, use of crude force under the circumstances could easily be counterproductive. It is to be understood that behind such demand lies the real demand for justice. Long-term plans to reform the bureaucracy, revise the national budget and overhaul the judicial system will positively affect the capability and professionalism of the armed forces. Civilians should plan further internal reform, including sensitive areas like intelligence and special forces. Further, the civilian polity has to be strengthened by providing adequate political space and this freedom to air political
grievances and must increase their capability to govern without relying too much on the military. The gap between the military and the civilians must be addressed and at the same time the military has to re-orient its mission and doctrines emphasising on the value of professionalism. Civilians and military should develop new definition of the military's role as well as determine their respective political boundaries.

At the same time, Indonesia must take concrete steps to open doors to East Timor inquiry. If democratic government has one transcendent quality, it is openness. Allegations against a number of top army brass involved in human rights violations in East Timor should be properly investigated and guilty must be punished. This will necessarily become a lesson to deter military's future role of a possible tyrant.

It is a welcoming development, however, that ABRI is no longer the monolithic rock it once was portrayed to be. Senior officers now describe ABRI as solid, but with its strains. Already the police has been separated from the military. Many of the officers have emerged from years of distrust during the Suharto era with their personal integrity and reputation greatly enhanced because of widespread knowledge of their support for political reform at a time when it was dangerous to hold such views.

**Small is Beautiful???

Rarely in the contemporary world history a tiny country with such a small population and for so long with so few friends could have such a large impact at the international level as that of East Timor's. It is East Timor's undaunted struggle for freedom and long patience for justice that won them the sympathy and attention of the world which they longed since long. But today, when they are
really free, the question of their survival as a small nation has often been asked. Today, the world scenario has changed drastically. In the free world, nations are competing each other in a free market economy model. Obviously, there is a doubt, can East Timor as a small nation survive in the world today? As we consider East Timor's future, it should be interesting to examine its economic prospects by looking, in part, at the performance of other tiny nations in and around Asia.

In terms of landscape, East Timor is nine times larger than Mauritius, nineteen times larger than Singapore, and about half the size of Bhutan. Population wise, it is about equal to Bhutan, slightly smaller than Mauritius and a good deal smaller than Singapore. Like East Timor is lying between two giants, Australia and Indonesia, so also, Bhutan is squeezed between India and China. It has a population of just one million who are governed under a constitutional monarch. Having a tilt towards India, it is slowly and steadily modernising, but not at the cost of compromising its culture which has borrowed a lot from Buddhism. Despite its size and geographic location, Bhutan is not bankrupt, rather doing well to boost economic growth, health and education standards through major hydro-electricity projects and primary industry development.

The success story of Singapore, as President Habibie once commented, a red dot on world map, is not only an example for East Timor, but even many Indian experts try to implement its success formula on their own soil. Singapore is blessed by its unique geographic location on the major sea-lanes and air corridors of the world. With only a population half of East Timor, it is the fastest growing economy of the world today. Also, Mauritius is performing well by exploring its island tourism. It is today pushing
itself to establish a stopover place on an alternative route between Australia and Europe.

All these examples authenticate the new mantra that small is strength, not weakness – only if one has good ideas and vision. East Timor has its visionary leader Xanana Gusmao. The way Xanana gave the East Timorese independence struggle a new direction with the formation of CRRN, an umbrella group of pro-independence parties, in 1981, which was later changed to CNRM under his Presidency, is really incredible. Gusmao is a charismatic and thoroughly charming character having a poet in his heart.

A broad-minded leader as is known, Gusmao wants to take a reconciliatory path in his approach to militias, Indonesia and others. ‘The birth of the Timorese nation cannot take place in the midst of division, discord and rancour’, he wrote in his future policy approach paper. ‘Regardless of past political positions, all citizens are called upon to embrace the need for harmony, and to show forgiveness and tolerance towards their brothers for the sake of our national interests’. ‘All of us must let go of the bad things they have done to us’, he said in his first speech after returning to Timor, ‘Because the future is ours’.

Gusmao’s background may not contain much economic theory or public administration know-how. He said he was not suited to the job for running the country. But his ability to reach out to people and bring them together has been unmatched. In a battered, directionless East Timor, that is the kind of leadership the people need.

Gusmao may definitely be the hope of the East Timorese. But the newborn state will face two immediate problems – poverty and in-fighting. The economic statistics are grim and speak for
themselves: 41 per cent of Timorese live in abject poverty on less than 50 cents a day. Over half of them are illiterate and very few have the sort of higher education needed to succeed in modern world. Not surprisingly, life expectancy is a pathetic 57 years and the majority of babies are underweight at birth. Timor Lorosae needs billions of dollars in international aid before it can turn the corner.

East Timor will no doubt receive some foreign aid. However, the pattern among most Western governments has been to reduce aid levels, so Timor will be competing with other developing countries for a diminishing supply. As far as corruption among politicians and bureaucrats is concerned, many ex-colonies made errors in their early years of independence, and East Timorese could easily take the wrong road. There is also every chance of the emergence of 'elite politics' dominated by influential families and businesses.

Secondly, most of the common East Timorese are concerned about the in-fighting of their leaders which may ruin the island's future. They want their leaders to have good relations. The East Timorese constitution has made the President's position more of a figurehead than the American model. As has been mentioned, East Timor's first Chief Minister, who has day-to-day control over the government, is Mari Alkatiri from Fretilin. It remains to be seen just how well Gusmao can operate as a figurehead with the real power elsewhere. It is to be seen if both can cooperate each other. This is the time to recall Mau Lear's literary handbook *Rai Timur Rai ita Niang* of 1975, which stressed the need for unity of all Timorese. An early lesson of it says, 'A long time ago colonialism came to our land because our ancestors were fighting each other'. Even the popular
Timorese song *Kdadalak* calls for the unity of all Timorese, where their power has been compared with streams.

*Steams flowing together become rivers,*
*Rivers increase whoever opposes them,*
*So must the children of Timor unite,*
*Unite against the wind blowing in from the sea.*

Now that external enemies of colonialism and aggression are gone, the East Timorese must unite to fight against the internal enemies such as poverty, malnutrition and unemployment. No one else understands this better than Xanana Gusmao himself when he remarked, 'The independence of the first nation-state of the new millenium will have no value if people in East Timor continue to live in poverty and suffer all kinds of difficulties'. East Timor must survive the challenge of development with the strength of idealism, nationhood and a desire to create a better tomorrow.