Local politics in decentralized Indonesia: the Governor General of Banten Province

Okamoto Masaaki

I am the governor general” says local boss H.Tb. Chasan Sochib. He is a peculiar (or typical) type of local boss in decentralized Indonesia. How and why did he become so powerful?

The New Order in Banten

The Banten area, previously a part of West Java province, is comprised of Serang, Lebak, Pandeglang and Tangerang regencies and the cities of Cilegon and Tangerang. The north is comprised of Tangerang regencies and the cities of Serang, Lebak, Pandeglang and West Java province, is comprised of Banten and Cilegon. West Java province is the largest steel company in Southeast Asia.

By Okamoto Masaaki

The New Order in Banten cemented the ethnic divide between rulers and the ruled. The fall of Suharto in May 1997 changed this informal governing system. Chasan Sochib, product of the New Order, was endangered.

Birth of the reformed Chasan Sochib

The Reformasi echoed in Banten. Chasan Sochib turned to his old methods – reliance on jawara to sway Banten province, first economically and then politically. Co-opted by the centrally appointed non-Bantenese provin-

tional governor to guarantee the security of the province, he was rewarded with numerous projects. He became the new Banten provincial branch head of Kadin and of Gapensi, and of the Construction Business Development Committee (LPJK).

He became politically powerful too. In December 2001, elections for provincial governor were held in the provincial parliament and a Javanese politician, Joko Muandhar from the Development United Party (PPP) and Chasan Sochib’s political lay-daughter, Atut Chosiyah from Golkar, won the governor and vice governorships. This would have been impossible without Chasan Sochib’s support and jawara pressure on parliamentarians.

Now Chasan Sochib could intervene in provincial government policies on personnel and budgeting. His con-

clusion: “I am the Governor General. If he (Joko Munandar) goes wrong in leading Banten, I will correct him. As I am most responsible for him. He rose with my support.”

Naturally there is opposition to Chasan Sochib’s dominance in Banten. Ex-Bakor members have formed an anti-Chasan Sochib organisation, though it has remained ineffective thus far. Newspapers cannot be too critical of him; machetes may well be the reward for criticism.

Conclusion

The 2004 general election passed peacefully in Banten, though invalid votes reached two million out of about six million votes and jawara were dispersed to various parties. There was no large-scale violence as political parties committed themselves not to mobilize jawara. Chasan Sochib was one of the Golkar spokesmen. Golkar barely won with about 21% of the valid votes. Is this a problem for Chasan Sochib? Seem-

ingly not, as he still keeps jawara in hand and holds top positions in business associations and the government. When he realized that the movement had deep-rooted and wide support in Banten, he became an enthusiastic proponent. He became the general adviser to the Coordination Committee to Establish Banten Province (Bakor) in February 2000. Mass mobilization, money and lobbying and the centre bore fruit. In October 2000, the law establishing Banten province passed in parliament. Thousands of Bantenese welcomed it and Chasan Sochib was on their side.

Entrenched power

Chasan Sochib faced threats from all sides. If not, the same pattern will most likely continue.

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stitution company won tenders for the Banten Regional Police Headquarters, the Provincial Parliament, the Provin-


cial Government Complex and several main roads at inflated prices. The provincial parliament is unable or unwilling to check his influence. Refer-

ring to the traditional market where Chasan Sochib and his associates have their offices, provincial legislators often say “We just wait for the agreement from the Rau.” Referring back to an earlier era, Chasan Sochib proudly stated “I am actually the Governor General. If he (Joko Munandar) goes wrong in leading Banten, I will correct him. As I am most responsible for him. He rose with my support.”

Young Japanese Researchers on Southeast Asia Series

Okamoto Masaaki is the fifth contributor to this series, which draws attention to original research by young Japanese scholars with research interests in Southeast Asia. Japanese research on Southeast Asia has a long tradition, but is abundant, and at times takes different routes from European or American research on the region. Many Japanese scholars publish in Japanese or in Southeast Asian languages; consequently, dissemination to non-Japanese readers remains limited. If you wish to introduce your own research on Southeast Asia, please contact the editors of the IAS Newsletter.

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