

Indonesia proposes a development triangle

by Mary Burdman

Indonesian President Suharto became the first non-European head of state to visit Germany since its unification, in his state visit to Bonn July 3-7. Coming at this "unique moment," the visit has "special meaning" beyond returning the visit of Chancellor Helmut Kohl to Indonesia three years ago, Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said at his July 4 press conference in Bonn.

The special meaning of the visit, is that the government of Indonesia is proposing, in the wake of the profound developments in Eastern Europe since 1989, that relations among Eastern and Western Europe and Southeast Asia must be transformed for their mutual benefit. In the midst of threatened trade wars and moves to consolidate "free trade" blocs, this focus is quite refreshing. It could also be of great benefit.

Who is propping up whom?

Minister Alatas, who gave the only press conference during the visit, was blunt. While emphasizing that German-Indonesian relations have "proceeded in a good way," he did not mince words in pointing out their shortcomings. While developing-sector nations are unfailingly depicted as "beggars" by the press in the industrialized nations, it is quite well known who is supporting whom, he said. There is a significant negative cash outflow from the Third World to the advanced countries, he said, and economic relations between Indonesia and Germany are no exception.

Each year, Indonesia never fails to pay, in "hard cash," its obligations to the rest of the world, but the burden is getting "heavier and heavier," Alatas said, especially as foreign investment is not keeping pace with what is needed. Indeed, last year, while Indonesia repaid Germany DM 600 million, German investment only amounted to DM 300 million. Indonesia will be facing social and economic problems if the pace of development is slowed down, Alatas said; but his government is clearly aware that, in the east at least, Germany has the same problem.

Indonesia is "very sympathetic" to Germany's commitment to Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union, Alatas said. It is "not just saying 'do not diminish cooperation with the rest of the world.' We must think how to utilize this new situation" to the benefit of all.

President Suharto proposed in his talks with both President Richard von Weizsäcker and Chancellor Kohl, that the passenger ships Indonesia is ordering from Germany be pro-

duced in the eastern states, to "keep its industry alive." These ships, which Germany can build far better than Indonesia, are vital to its infrastructure as a nation of thousands of islands. Indonesia also needs dredges for its many harbors, which it again wants to order from eastern Germany.

President Suharto also proposed that many of the materials needed for the economic development of Eastern Europe, could be produced far more cheaply in Southeast Asia than in western Germany. "What we are proposing is a triangular kind of agreement," among western Germany, Indonesia, and Eastern Europe, Alatas said, that could enhance development of both Asia and Eastern Europe.

The real issue of human rights

These proposals are part of Indonesia's counter to the barrage of attacks, like those on other developing nations, for alleged environmental and human rights violations. Alatas denounced the "Hobbes-Rousseau-Enlightenment" basis of Western human rights campaigns, such as those led by Amnesty International. "Human rights are universal," Alatas said. You cannot just "pick and choose" which rights you choose to defend. Human beings are at the center of national development, and Indonesia welcomes discussions of human rights for this reason. International agreements on human rights must be made, however, on the basis of national sovereignty, he emphasized, and nations' history and culture must be taken into account.

"I am a lawyer, I know the basis of the Western concept of human rights," Alatas said. It began only 300 years ago, with Thomas Hobbes, and his "each against all" and social contract; this is where the current Western concept of human rights comes from. But in Asia, we are very ancient, great cultures, he said. "We have *not* just climbed out of the trees, as so many of you think!"

This correspondent asked Alatas what he thought of another Western conception of human rights, that based on natural law. Alatas nodded agreement, when I said that this concept of human rights and development was embodied in the Pope's recent encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*. This concept was the basis of the U.S. Constitution, but is no longer the policy of the U.S. government. "I do not know what you think of George Bush's new world order," I continued, "but I do not think it means human rights."

"Not exactly!" responded Alatas, with a laugh. "That is not *our* new world order. You know what we mean by a new world order? We mean true social justice, true democratic agreements among nations, and true freedom. . . . You cannot begin a new world order by being arrogant." The West may be more successful than the Third World now, Alatas said, but that is no reason to be arrogant. We want to emulate your success, but in our own economic and political terms. "How do you describe happiness?" he asked. It certainly cannot always be done in the sense of success as Western nations now define it, he said.