
WIRING THE *WARUNG* TO GLOBAL GATEWAYS: THE INTERNET IN INDONESIA¹

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"The development of Internet is a very democratic, grassroots development process." (Pembangunan Internet merupakan sebuah proses pembangunan yang merakyat dan sangat demokratis)

Onno W. Purbo, computer specialist in
his Foundation Day Oration at Duta
Wacana Christian University,
Yogyakarta, October 31, 1996

"Through Hankam-Net it is hoped that the deep-seated symptoms of crisis and erosion of nationalism as a consequence of the impact of globalization, which is difficult to resist, can be countered by the broadcasting of heroic and patriotic information via Internet to mobilize devotion to the Indonesian Nation and State." (Melalui Hankam-Net diharapkan gejala krisis dan erosi nasionalisme yang berlarut sebagai akibat dari dampak globalisasi yang sulit dibendung dapat dilawan dengan tayangan informasi Internet yang heroik dan patriotik untuk menggerakkan terus menerus kecintaan akan Bangsa dan Negara Indonesia)

¹ We wish to thank our research assistant, Ruth Stone, who has contributed greatly to this research. We also acknowledge the support of the Asia Research Centre for Social, Political, and Economic Change, Murdoch University, which funded preliminary research for this paper.

Edi Sudrajat, Minister for Defense and Security, in his speech inaugurating ABRI's Internet home-page

"Internet" = "Indonesia terkenal negatif terus" (Indonesia is always infamous)

from "Humorous Abbreviations Dictionary," listed on INDONESIA-L, January 20, 1997

The global enthusiasm about the Internet has infused the reception of this new communication technology in Indonesia. In much of this discourse—both in Indonesia and elsewhere—there is a tendency to invest the technology with a certain socio-political determinacy, that is, a belief that the technology will affect all societies in a particular way, regardless of its specificities. In our very preliminary survey here of the Internet in Indonesia, we want to test some of the utopian projections about the Internet's democratic potential in the context of Indonesian politics in the mid-1990s. While Indonesia remains one of the least networked countries in Southeast Asia,² with an estimated forty thousand subscribers by the end of 1996, the Internet has been embraced by both the technophilic developmentalists (personified by Minister B. J. Habibie) within the New Order state and by the middle-class opposition to that coterie. Of course the Internet (or more correctly, CMCs, Computer Mediated Communications technology), like any other technology, lends itself to a limited, but varied, range of (occasionally contradictory) possibilities. We want to understand which of the technological options of the Net are political options in Indonesia.

As will become clear in the discussion later on, when we look at the Internet, what constitutes "Indonesian" becomes somewhat problematic, as so much of the cyber traffic defies attempts to contextualize its spatial/national source or target. Yet our own access to the Internet and consequently our understanding of its function in the Indonesian political scene is, to a large extent, shaped by our six months location in Yogyakarta (June to December 1996) and our continued surfing of what we might call Indonesian cyber-spaces after our return to Perth, Australia, in January 1997. This paper follows some of the trail of our experience of the Net from Yogyakarta to Perth.

On-Line, In Yogya

1995 was dubbed the "Year of the Internet" by *Time* magazine. In Yogya, however, it was not until September 1996 that the toll gates of the much-vaunted "information superhighway" opened in earnest. Running almost imperceptibly alongside the busy thoroughfares of Jalan Cornel Simandjuntak and Jalan Colombo, and extending down past the Central Post Office, its advent was announced in street banners and advertisements in the local press and radio. Throughout the month, bunting was hoisted and displayed on bamboo poles every fifty meters down Colombo and Gejayan streets, from the campuses of Atma Jaya and Sanata Dharma universities, past the IKIP (teachers' college), and along the southern face of prestigious Gadjah Mada University (UGM).

² D. P. Hamilton, "Restricted Access," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 15, 1994, cited in S. Rao and N. C. Natesan, "Internet: Threat or Opportunity for India?," *Media Asia* 23, 2(1996): 96–99 and 106.

For a week or more a bustling crowd of young people, and a thick bunch of parked motorcycles, and the odd bicycle outside a small *warung* (kiosk), drew attention to the highway's brand new pit stop in Jalan Colombo: the Maga *warnet* (*warung internet*) or Internet cafe. When it opened on September 17, offering free access for the inaugural week, its seven booths were constantly in use throughout the opening hours: 9 am to 10 pm. Less than a kilometer away, on Jalan Simandjuntak on the western edge of the UGM campus, about three hundred meters from the university's own Internet computer center, GAMA-net, another Internet cafe, Pujayo.C@fe.Net had opened on September 9. Its eight computer terminals were dramatically visible through the four glass walls, which carved out a third of the downstairs floor space of Pujayo's popular eatery and karaoke lounge.

With much less fanfare, on September 12 a third public access Internet point began operations. Wasantara-net, the national Internet service provider established by the government's postal service, PT Pos Indonesia, started up its *warung pos internet* (Internet post shop) with three computers tucked away in a ground floor corner of the city's Central Post Office. Wasantara had only begun offering dial-in services for business and individual clients in Yogya in February 1996, and by September had built up a clientele of about seven hundred, leveling off at about sixty to seventy new subscribers monthly.³ The *warnet* was a logical extension of Wasantara's services. It was part of an ambitious national strategy to supply Internet access via local nodes in all Indonesian provinces, paralleling conventional postal services.

The location of both Maga and Pujayo in the Higher Education heartland of Yogya, arguably the most intellectual of Indonesian provincial cities, guaranteed a prospective clientele and source of staff recruitment for the *warnets*. Even compared with Jakarta (where dial-in Internet access had been available for private customers since May 1995), the multiplication of public access Internet points in Yogya seemed rapid. In Jakarta only a couple of Internet cafes had been established by the end of 1996.⁴ Surabaya, too, with a much larger population than Yogya, appeared to only have one Internet cafe, the CCF Cybercafe, in the French Cultural Center, which opened in mid July 1996.⁵ But Yogya's high ratio of tertiary students per head of population (second only to Jakarta),⁶ and a concentration of higher education institutions at the northern

³ Interview with Sariyono Setyabudi, unit head of Wasantara Yogyakarta, December 5, 1996, who believed that nationally Wasantara had about two thousand subscribers.

⁴ During a November 1996 visit to Jakarta, we were only able to locate and visit one Internet cafe, the Cyber Corner in the Twilite Cafe, Kemang. We were told at least one other existed, but were not able to clarify precisely where. There were two articles on "cyber-cafes" in a special Internet edition of *InfoKomputer* magazine (undated, but on sale in September 1996) but with the exception of the statement that "One cybercafe soon to be built in Jakarta is the K@FE.INTERNET" (p. 58), there was no mention whatsoever of any in existence in Indonesia. Nor were any listed in the international cyber cafe guide, <<http://www.easynet.co.uk/pages/cafe/ccafe.htm>> (when checked January 17, 1997). However, in November 1996, two "TGA Internet Cafes" opened, both located in Toko Gunung Agung bookshops (at the Taman Anggrek Mall, central Jakarta, and the Mega Mall, Pluit, north Jakarta). The ventures were collaborations between the bookshops, IndoInternet, and PT Skill, a computer and information technology company. Details from <skillnet@skill.co.id>, February 1997.

⁵ Details of the CCF Cybercafe, which, like the TGA cafes in Jakarta, was also sponsored by IndoInternet, are given on the homepage <<http://www.surabaya.indo.net.id/euro.htm>>.

⁶ See "About Higher Education" located on the Indonesian Department of Education and Culture's homepage <<http://www.pdk.go.id/New/3rd.htm>> (February 22, 1997).

end of the city, made it ideal for the expansion of pay-by-the-hour Internet services, since it is among the young tertiary-educated population that interest in information technology is highest. In Yogya, the superhighway became easily accessible to those who did not own their own hardware, who did not even have a phone line. Rates, starting at about Rp. 100 (approximately five US cents) per minute, about twice the cost of local timed phone calls, vastly cheaper than long-distance calls (about 3 percent the price of a call to Australia), and about half the price charged at a Jakarta Internet cafe,⁷ were clearly within reach of many university students.

According to staff at the three public-access Internet points, most Indonesian users seemed to be young (between twenty and thirty years of age) and predominantly male (in the case of Wasantara's *warnet* up to about 90 percent male). A substantial proportion of initial users were reportedly non-Indonesian residents or tourists passing through Yogya (estimates by staff about 50 percent of Wasantara, 40 percent of Pujayo, and just over 10 percent of Maga patrons were non-Indonesian). But the Indonesian customers were more regular. Their ready adoption of public access Internet suggested that its popularity may emulate the boom in public telephone and facsimile services, through the government-owned and private "*wartel*" (*warung telekomunikasi*) which began to dot the Indonesian urban landscape in the mid-1980s. By the early 1990s there were twenty-five thousand public phones and eight hundred *wartel* around the country,⁸ with the latter, particularly, used frequently for semi-public political communication.⁹

For many subscribers, the Internet in Yogya remains frustratingly slow, unreliable, inefficient, and prone to glitches, much like the national telephone system a decade or so ago.¹⁰ Yet despite such irritations, those who connected to the Net found there was much to read. As the search for information peaked in the weeks after the July 27 civil unrest,¹¹ those sites or mailing lists carrying information on Indonesian politics were filled with a melange of postings, with information and opinion of all colors and

⁷ Cyber Corner in the Twilite Cafe, Kemang, charged Rp. 5,000 per thirty minutes for "members" and Rp. 7,500 for non-members (November 1996).

⁸ Naswil Idris and Marwah Daud Ibrahim, "Communication Scene of Indonesia," in ed. Anura Goonasekera and Duncan Holaday, *Asian Communication Handbook* (Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Center, AMIC, 1993), pp. 59-86. Statistics from p. 63.

⁹ For instance, the first detailed account of the July 27 attack on the headquarters of the Indonesian Democracy Party (PDI) in Jakarta reached the UGM campus by fax. The disturbances had started sometime before dawn. By eleven am a three-page fax from LBH had reached various student groups and NGOs in Yogya.

¹⁰ Some UGM students had dubbed the WWW the "world-wide wait"!

¹¹ On the morning of July 27 a festering schism in the Indonesian Democracy Party (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia, PDI) erupted into violence when assailants mobilized by the government-sponsored contender to the leadership, Soerjadi, attacked the party Headquarters in central Jakarta, seeking to expel supporters of the popular Megawati Sukarnoputri, who had been elected to the leadership at a 1993 National Congress party congress. Concerns over Megawati's independent line had led to a government-engineered party split, and the ousting of Megawati at a stiffly stage-managed, poorly supported, extraordinary party congress in Medan, on June 20-24, 1996 at which Soerjadi claimed the leadership. The subsequent attack on the headquarters, condoned if not aided by the military, triggered Jakarta's worst rioting since January 1974.

complexions not available in any other media.¹² In Yogya at least “surfing the Net” had become one of the major sources of contraband information, joining other proven outlets, such as short-wave foreign news broadcasts, campus rumor networks, and faxed and photocopied underground bulletins distributed surreptitiously.

Only fifteen months after RADNET (PT Rahajasa Media Internet), the first commercial Internet service provider licensed in Indonesia, launched its services in Jakarta in May 1995,¹³ the Internet had “arrived” politically: government officials, business representatives, and radicals were all talking about it. Major daily newspapers, such as *Kompas*, *Media Indonesia*, and *Republika*, devoted regular sections or columns to Internet and associated computer technologies. Businesses were being assured “The Internet has changed the parameters of marketing. For half the cost of a full page advertisement in a national newspaper, you can have your own World Wide Web (WWW) server and address and audience of millions.”¹⁴ The Internet was being touted as offering on-line employment services, information of the latest medical advances, travel bookings, Indonesian rock music, education and cultural data, a window on the world.¹⁵ E-mail addresses began appearing on the ubiquitous name cards of a varied host of people, ranging from company directors to political activists. There were even television game-shows that welcomed participation from home via computer and modem. The Internet thus had a presence on the media and in politics well beyond what the actual numbers of connections (about 0.1 percent of the total population) might suggest.

Information Superhighway Gets To Indonesia

Like its Southeast Asian neighbors,¹⁶ the Indonesian government had embraced the information superhighway as part of its developmental dream by the early 1990s. Much of the groundwork upon which the superhighway has been built in Indonesia was laid by what one industry executive dubbed “Habibie’s kids,” a reference to a generation of foreign- and locally-trained technologists who benefited from the policies championed, and largesse bestowed, by the influential Minister for Research and Technology (since 1978), B. J. Habibie, a man who “has enjoyed President Suharto’s

¹² A selection of five Internet postings from this period has been translated and published in Jesse Randall, “Of Cracks and Crackdowns: Five Translations of Recent Internet Postings,” *Indonesia* 62 (October 1996): 37–52.

¹³ Information on RADNET taken from “RADNET (PT Rahajasa Media Internet) Company Profile” (9 pp. undated typescript), provided by Feraldi W. Loeis, of RADNET, Jakarta, November 18, 1996.

¹⁴ Advertisement for Fujitsu Internet Web Servers, *Kompas*, July 10, 1996, p.17.

¹⁵ See, e.g., “Sartono Tawarkan Cari Pekerjaan Lewat Internet,” *Kompas*, September 26, 1996, p. 3; “Memanfaatkan Jaringan INTERNET,” *Media Indonesia*, September 3, 1996, p. 14; “Kanker di Internet,” *Media Indonesia*, September 1, 1996, p. 18; “Indonesian artists leap onto Internet,” *Jakarta Post*, June 28, 1996, p. 2; “Data Pendidikan Indonesia Dapat Diakses di Internet,” *Kompas*, November 11, 1996, p. 20.

¹⁶ See Garry Rodan, *Information Technology and Political Control in Singapore* (Cardiff, USA: Working Paper No. 26, Japan Policy Research Institute, November 1996) for Singapore, and Krishna Sen “Australia, Asia and the Media,” in Gavin Jones, ed., *Australia in its Asian Context* (Canberra: Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia Occasional Paper No. 1, 1996), pp. 44–49.

patronage for more than twenty years,"¹⁷ and who was, not surprisingly, the first Indonesian Minister to have a "homepage" on the Internet!¹⁸

In 1986 the National Research Council (Dewan Riset Nasional), under Habibie, recommended the development of science and technology information services. In 1989 this crystallized (under the BPPT, the Agency for the Assessment and Application of Technology) into the design for the information network, IPTEKnet. Universities had been involved in experiments on Internet links since the mid-1980s. Prestigious universities, like Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), Surabaya Institute of Technology (ITS), Gadjah Mada (UGM) and the University of Indonesia (UI) had collaborated from 1986 in the establishment of an inter-university network, UniNet, funded by the Department of Education and Culture's Directorate of Higher Education. By the end of the decade hardware problems and the high cost of the required long-distance telephone connections stalled the project. In April 1993, the IPTEKnet Planning Committee commenced trials of a Micro-IPTEKnet prototype, involving six government instrumentalities. Several major universities and research institutes around the country joined. IPTEKnet, which began offering global Internet access in June 1994, remains the major non-commercial Internet provider for research and academic work.¹⁹

Many of the nation's computer engineers were the beneficiaries of Habibie's "grand vision" of a high-tech Indonesia, which portrayed high-tech Indonesia leapfrogging into the twenty-first century, powered by a boost from the Net. In the 1980s they staffed the universities like ITB and the research centers (like BPPT, and LAPAN, the Indonesian Aeronautics and Space Institute, both chaired by Habibie), promoting the concept of, and subsequently initiating trials for, Internet. In the mid 1990s they established the first commercial Internet companies, like RADNET. The boom in demand for Internet began in late 1995. With IPTEKnet increasingly accessible to academic staff in the major universities, and with the arrival of private commercial Internet service providers (ISPs) in the metropolises of Java, the Internet began developing a public profile in Indonesia. At the same time, the speed and efficiency of the technology was improving exponentially.²⁰

¹⁷ Takashi Shiraishi, "Rewiring the Indonesian State" in Daniel S. Lev and Ruth McVey, ed., *Making Indonesia*, (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, 1996), pp. 164-179. Quotation from p.164.

¹⁸ On January 3, 1997, Habibie launched his homepage <<http://habibie.ristek.go.id>>, and within three weeks about 1,200 log-ons had been recorded (according to INDONESIA-L, January 12, 1997, sourced to *Tempo Interaktif*, "Ketika Habibie Mejeng di Internet" on <http://www.tempo.co.id/mingguan/47/f_nas1.htm>).

¹⁹ Information on IPTEKnet is taken from <<http://www.iptek.net.id/background.html>> (downloaded January 31, 1997), with a comprehensive list of member organizations given on <<http://www.iptek.net.id/member.html>>. We are indebted to Mr. Tri Kuntoro Priyambodo, Network Manager of GAMA-net, the Gadjah Mada University Internet facility, for information of the university sector's early development of Internet technologies. Interview, Yogyakarta, July 18, 1996.

²⁰ In 1994 the connection speed from Indonesia via IPTEKnet, the sole provider, was only 64 Kbps (Kilobytes per second). In 1995 this had increased ten-fold to 640 Kbps, with a similar increase in providers. By October 1996, it exceeded 7Mbps (Megabytes per second). Onno W. Purbo, "Ceramah Ilmiah: Komunikasi Internet dan Dunia Pendidikan" in *Duta Wacana menyongsong Budaya Teknologi*, (Dies Natalis ke34, Duta Wacana Christian University, Yogyakarta, October 31, 1996, pp. 43-47.

The three principals of the pioneering firm RADNET established their company in July 1994, but immediately encountered obstacles due to government confusion over precisely which department had authority over Internet and what procedures ought to be followed before ISPs could legally commence offering services to the public. Several months earlier, in the absence of any guidelines, PT IndoInternet (known as "Indo.net") had commenced negotiations with PT Indosat (the government-owned satellite company) to establish an Internet service.²¹ But clarification of procedures only emerged after the issuing of the inaugural ISP license by the Department of Tourism, Post and Telecommunication (Departemen Pariwisata, Pos dan Telekomunikasi, henceforth Deparpostel) to RADNET in December, enabling it to commence offering services to the public in May 1995.

There is a widespread belief amongst the ISPs that the Department's officers made a policy decision to issue only a limited number of licenses and these only to companies run by technically competent young professionals, who were explicitly situated outside the politically well-connected conglomerates which dominate the domestic economy. No clear statement was made defining the maximum number of ISP licenses which could be issued, and over the first year a number of these "young" novice companies were swept into financial arrangements of various kinds with the major conglomerates or state concerns. CBN-net, for example, was rumored to have been absorbed into the Salim Group of companies. Similarly, RADNET, headed by a very young (the oldest of the founders was thirty-three years old) and highly qualified (all three principals had post-graduate degrees) leadership, also developed political connections, rumored to include former Minister Bustanil Arifin and to a lesser extent Admiral Sudomo and the president's son-in-law, Prabowo Subianto. The company established itself as a market leader in Jakarta and Surabaya.

By the close of 1995 there were estimated to be fifteen thousand Internet users in Indonesia being serviced by five commercial ISPs in addition to IPTEKnet. Over the following six months the figures mushroomed. By May 1996, twenty-two ISPs were listed with the Directorate-General of Tourism, Post and Telecommunications.²² By September two more had permits to operate, but only about fifteen were actually up and running. It was rumored that high establishment costs and stiff competition impelled some of the new ISPs to seek out additional financial backers or collaborative deals. Increasingly this practice was opening the industry to takeovers by, or

²¹ IndoInternet applied to Deparpostel in February 1995, and received the third ISP licence that August. Information on IndoInternet from company spokesperson, Sanjaya. Personal e-mail, February 28, 1997.

²² The commercial Internet Service Providers were: 1. Rahajasa Media Internet (RADNET); 2. Indosat (INDOSATnet); 3. IndoInternet (Indo.net); 4. Pos Indonesia (Wasantara.net); 5. Cyberindo Aditama (CBN.net); 6. Lintasarta (IdOLA); 7. Visionindo Network Perdana; 8. Melvar (melsa.net); 9. Pramindo Global Internet; 10. Uninet Bhaktinusa (UniINTERNET); 11. Yamabri; 12. Graha Sedaya Serasi; 13. Dyviacom Intrabumi; 14. Khasanah Timur Indonesia; 15. Alpha Netindo Pratama; 16. Meganusa Lintas Buana; 17. Jasa Jejaring Wasantara; 18. Uninet Media Sakti (UniNET); 19. Centrin Utama (Centrin); 20. Usaha Mediantara; 21. Transnet Mitra; 22. Sistelindo Mitralintas in association with IBM Global Network (ibm.net).

This list, sourced to the Directorate General of Tourism, Post & Telecommunication, appeared on <indonesia-l@igc.apc.org>, May 16, 1996. By January 1997, several others were advertising in industry magazines: BitNet (PT Bitnet Komunikasindo, supported by Satelindo), Signet (a subsidiary of PT Sigma Cipta Caraka), Meganet and Indodirect (PT Intermedia Grahapersada).

incorporation into, conglomerates with prior investment in the satellite and telecommunications industries.

Of the forty thousand subscribers estimated in Indonesia towards the end of 1996, about twenty-five thousand were using commercial providers, the largest of which were Indo.net (6,500 subscribers) and RADNET (five thousand subscribers).²³ These figures are, however, rubbery. Given the common practice of sharing passwords and accounts, the number of people with access to the Internet may be much larger than the number of accounts.²⁴ Industry insiders, like Henri K. Sumartono from RADNET, estimated an annual growth of 100 percent, but between 40 to 50 percent of this growth was from the government or university sectors, which had access to non-commercial service providers (like IPTEKnet). Others project even higher growth rates.²⁵ According to Deparpostel estimates, in 1995–96 the Information Technology market in Indonesia was worth more than Rp. 100 billion (approximately US \$43.5 million) with about 40 percent of this concentrated in the Banking and Finance industries.²⁶

There appear to be no verifiable or even widely accepted statistics outlining who uses the Internet. An unsourced set of figures which appeared both on the *apakabar* mailing list (the largest Indonesia-related mailing list) and in *InfoKomputer*, Indonesia's foremost computer magazine, is as follows: commercial enterprises (national and multinational, and including the World Wide Web versions of terrestrial publications) 42.8 percent; research institutes 5.8 percent; universities 29.5 percent; government departments and instrumentalities 20.9 percent; and non-government community organizations (NGOs) 1 percent.²⁷ Geographically, the largest concentration of users is in Jakarta, where commercial ISPs dominate, followed by Bandung, where universities (primarily ITB, Bandung Institute of Technology) provide the service.²⁸ Onno W. Purbo, the country's leading Internet buff, believes "on the basis of several market research studies" that the profile of the average Internet user in Indonesia is no different from that identified by "overseas" (presumably Euro-American) research: most are between twenty-five and forty years old, single or married without children, 70 to 80 percent are male, the majority with at least a first university degree, and from the middle to upper income groups. However, while of the Internet users "abroad" (again presumably in Europe and America) only about 30 percent log-on from their own homes, with most linked to the Net from work or an educational institution, in Indonesia, where one finds a comparative lack of facilities at the workplace or university, more than 50 percent connect from home.²⁹

²³ "Bisnis Internet Service Provider: Harus kreatif," *InfoKomputer*, September 1996, pp. 132–4.

²⁴ Estimates given by Feraldi W. Loeis of RADNET, interview, Jakarta, November 18, 1996.

²⁵ Feraldi W. Loeis, Jakarta, November, 18, 1996.

²⁶ "HP World '96: Joop Ave: Kebutuhan Instalasi Jaringan Komputer di Indonesia masih tinggi," *InfoKomputer*, September 1996, p. 119.

²⁷ The source of the estimated user percentages is not given, but they also appear in Onno W. Purbo, "Bisnis di Internet Menggiurkan," *InfoKomputer*, Special Internet Edition, n.d. [September 1996], pp. 42–47. Purbo, one of Indonesia's leading researchers and writers about the Internet, is from the highly regarded Computer Network Research Group in the Inter-University Center on Micro-electronics, at the Bandung Institute of Technology.

²⁸ Purbo, "Bisnis di Internet Menggiurkan," p. 43.

²⁹ Purbo, "Bisnis di Internet Menggiurkan," p. 46.

When the weekly magazine *Tempo* (banned along with two other publications in June 1994) decided to go on-line as *Tempo Interaktif* in March 1996,³⁰ it requested registration details of its subscribers over the initial six months (March-August). While such findings depend on the honesty of respondents (a third routinely falsify such information according to a study in Europe and the USA)³¹ and only apply directly to the 7,002 *Tempo Interaktif* subscribers during this period, the data reveals at least a sketchy profile of the people who are accessing Indonesian-language on-line media. Of *Tempo Interaktif* subscribers, 57.57 percent were using Indonesian e-mail addresses, which suggests that just over 10 percent of Indonesia's networked population of forty thousand people is logging into *Tempo Interaktif*. Other subscribers were spread across thirty-five countries, with significant numbers in the USA (18.5 percent), Australia (10 percent) and Japan (3.21 percent).³² Nearly 69 percent of subscribers were aged between twenty-one and thirty-five years of age. 89 percent were male.³³ Of the Indonesia-based subscribers, 51.75 percent used office facilities to connect, 42.45 percent dialed from home, and 3.84 percent logged on from a university.

Politics On The Net

Compared with the US, and even compared to some of its Asian neighbors like Singapore, in Indonesia concern about pornography on the Internet has been muted. The view from the Yogya Internet *warungs* suggests that demand for pornographic sites is low—at the Wasantara *warnet* this may be true possibly because such material would be visible to passers-by at the post office. Pujayo's also felt that interest in pornographic sites was minimal, restricted to "curious young kids." Maganet, which has private computer booths, observed their clientele had some interest in "cyberporn," but staff believed that interest in political information was at least as strong, followed by interest in using the Internet for academic research. As a matter of principle Maga chose not to intervene or block clients' access to porn or politics. However, Jakarta's Internet cafe Cyber Corner posted notices forbidding access to pornographic sites.

From the point of view of the government, by far the most problematic aspect of Internet usage is the search for uncensored political information. One of the major irritants for the army and the Department of Information has been the enormous success of a mailing list popularly called *apakabar* moderated by John MacDougall in Maryland, USA. *InfoKomputer's* special issue on the Internet in Indonesia did not name

³⁰ For a more detailed discussion of the response of the Indonesian print media to new Internet technologies in the wake of the 1994 bans, see David T. Hill, "Going On-line: Indonesia After The 1994 Press Bans" (forthcoming).

³¹ A 1996 survey of 15,000 Net users in the USA and Europe conducted by Georgia Technical college in the USA found that 33.5 percent of respondents said they falsify information on Web registration forms. David Watts "Users give false details, survey finds," *The West Australian* (Perth), January 21, 1997, p. 46.

³² Figures provided by Saiful B. Ridwan, Information Technology Manager, *Tempo Interaktif*, November 14, 1996, in a two-page typescript, titled "Tempo Interaktif."

³³ Overseas experience suggests that it is common for initial Internet users to be male, but the ratio balances more within a few years. The Georgia Technical college (GVU) survey of Internet users in the USA and Europe (see Note 31 above) found that while in 1994 the male:female ratio was 95:5, by 1996 it has shifted to 69:31. See Watts, "Users give false details, survey finds," p. 46.

apakabar in its list of Indonesian web-sites operating in 1996, but in many ways *apakabar* has become synonymous with the Internet in Indonesia.³⁴

In 1984 MacDougall established a private research support enterprise, Indonesia Publications, producing and marketing quality research data on various aspects of contemporary Indonesia. During the early 1990s he contributed significantly to various Internet conferences and newsgroups, which eventually crystallized as a free Internet mailing list known as *apakabar* (though more correctly called "INDONESIA-L"). In mid 1996, he added a more comprehensive service, INDONESIA-P, for which there is an annual fee of \$US 120. *Apakabar* has grown into one of the most significant sources of information for contemporary scholarship on Indonesia and is regarded by many activists in the NGO community as a valuable means of disseminating their materials and a crucial source of uncensored domestic and international news. In the words of one Indonesian academic and newspaper columnist, "*Apakabar* has become a phenomenon. It would not be overstating it to describe it as a legend on the Internet."³⁵ Another writer corresponding from a University of Indonesia address stated: "I am a loyal follower of this fabulous forum and I am pleased that we have such an extraordinary mechanism by which to state our opinions and our thoughts freely and openly."³⁶ In late 1995 several prominent articles in the mainstream national print media drew attention to *apakabar*,³⁷ noting especially the speed with which politically sensitive news got posted on the List. The weekly *Gatra* wrote, for instance, that news of arrest and release of some prominent activists was on *apakabar* within hours, but did not make the local papers until the following morning. Press coverage of military statements about the subversive potentials of the Internet inevitably includes references to *apakabar*. There were many references to it in the Indonesian print media in the wake of the July 27 incident when the number of people accessing the site rose to an all-time high.³⁸ *Republika* daily (associated with the Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals' Association, ICMI, founded by Habibie in December 1990),³⁹ obviously following the "dozens of pieces on the riots . . . published by John Mac Dougall [sic] on his *apakabar@clark.net*," quoted from the Net the views of radical organizations such as PIJAR about the July 27 affair.⁴⁰ The article was titled, characteristically, "Armed Forces Commander: The community mustn't be conned by all these instigations" (Pangab: Masyarakat jangan Terpancing Segala Hasutan").

³⁴ In one conversation, one of Indonesia's most senior journalists continually spoke of how "the Internet" operates but in each statement actually meant the *apakabar* list. "But the Internet carries un-verified gossip" he said drawing every instance from *apakabar*. "But something a friend wrote did not get into the Internet," meaning that the moderator of *apakabar* had not put it on the list!

³⁵ RM Roy Suryo, "Kemana setelah 'apakabar' ditutup," *Media Indonesia*, September 5, 1996, p. 10.

³⁶ Posting dated February 1, 1997, from Manneke Budiman <manneke@makara.cso.ui.ac.id>. (Original: Saya seorang pengikut setia forum yang istimewa ini dan saya senang bahwa kita punya sebuah sarana yang luarbiasa untuk menyatakan pendapat dan pikiran dengan bebas dan terbuka.)

³⁷ "Ini Milik MacDougall," *Gatra*, December 2, 1995 on <apakabar@clark.net> November 28, 1995.

³⁸ "Indonesia-L alias *apakabar*: Paduan fenomena politik dan Internet," *Republika Online*, September 26, 1996. See note 11 above for details of the July 27 incident and aftermath.

³⁹ On ICMI, see Douglas E. Ramage, *Politics in Indonesia: Democracy, Islam and the Ideology of Tolerance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 75-121.

⁴⁰ *Republika*, July 29, 1996, posted via KdP on <apakabar@clark.net> on July 30, 1996.

MacDougall has gone to considerable lengths to ensure the anonymity of all participants on *apakabar*. As a consequence of the security mechanisms, it is not possible to determine precisely how many people have access: *apakabar* is circulated by the original and relay mailing lists, local newsgroups and lists, bulletin boards, relaying individual subscribers, groups sharing a single e-mail address, and various other Web sites in addition to *apakabar*'s archival database located at a Stuttgart Web site. However, around the end of 1995, MacDougall attempted to determine the number of identifiable recipients of *apakabar* material and believed it to be about thirteen thousand. This estimate was made prior to the boom in interest generated by the July 27 incident and subsequent references to *apakabar* in the Indonesian press. MacDougall is confident that the majority of users are Indonesians living in Indonesia, followed by Indonesians living or studying abroad.⁴¹

Within hours of the July 27 attack on the PDI headquarters, *apakabar* was running a detailed chronology of the unfolding events. The PDI itself posted on *apakabar* a poignant appeal from <pd.megawati@indonesia.raya> urging "brothers and sisters throughout the country" ("Saudara-Saudara Sebangsa dan Setanah Air") to circulate details of the attack as widely as possible, by e-mailing, or printing out reports "because at the moment all sources of information (newspapers, TV etc.) have been pressured not to broadcast what really happened."⁴²

That members of the Indonesian political public had come to rely on Internet for uncensored information was evident in the response to a shut-down (as things transpired, a temporary shut-down) of *apakabar* due to financial difficulties. "Where can we go now that *apakabar* has closed?" bemoaned Gadjah Mada academic, RM Roy Suryo, in his regular newspaper column about the Internet, before predicting that "it is very likely that other 'apakabars' will be born based on the same mechanisms."⁴³ Indeed within days the pro-democracy alliance PIJAR expanded the mailing list for its news bulletin, *Kabar dari PIJAR* <KdP@usa.net>, filling something of the void left (albeit for only a few weeks) during *apakabar*'s absence. The efficiency and speed with which KdPnet was able to replicate some of the function of *apakabar*, albeit with a much smaller subscription list (517, with about half the subscribers using Indonesian e-mail addresses, the rest with either non-Indonesian or untraceable addresses)⁴⁴ gave credence to the assertion that the net is "self-repairing."

Given the nature of the technology, it is easy to imagine that if a link were to be cut by the government, information could be rapidly re-directed around the severed node. If the government closes down a domestic site or news-posting group, another will spring up at some other location. One example of the capacity of the Internet to challenge the curfews and cordons set by the New Order is the continued presence on the Net of the Democratic People's Party (Partai Rakyat Demokratik, PRD), a small pro-labor, largely student-based party accused by the authorities of planning the July 27 riots. Despite the authorities' concerted crackdown on the PRD after July 27, the

⁴¹ Information provided by John MacDougall via e-mail, January 19, 1997.

⁴² Posting headed "To: Internet Users of Indonesia; Subject: Kronologi penyerbuan 27 Juli," on <apakabar@clark.net>, July 29, 1996.

⁴³ Suryo, "Kemana setelah 'apakabar' ditutup," p.10.

⁴⁴ Statistics provided by KdPnet in personal e-mail communication, January 28, 1997.

arrest of the party leadership and the harassment and intimidation of the rank-and-file, the party continued posting on the Web and on *apakabar*, from an ISP outside Indonesia, maintaining its profile and thumbing its nose at the government, nationally and internationally. The military's spokesman on social and political affairs, Lt. Gen. Syarwan Hamid, has reportedly acknowledged this presence in a recent meeting with all major Jakarta NGOs, and professional and religious organizations. He commented that the PRD's considerable power is "evident in its activity on the Internet. Their writings are published at least twice a week. If they are prepared to show themselves on the Internet, it means they are strong. If they were not strong they would not be visible."⁴⁵

When the Internet cafes opened in Yogyakarta six weeks after the July 27 riots in Jakarta, there were many eager to scan the Internet for information presumed to be unavailable in the national media. Pujayo's estimated that about 40 percent of Indonesian clients sought out *apakabar* and consulted it regularly. And in those early weeks both privately-owned Internet cafes in Yogya kept information on hand to assist those customers who wanted help to connect to *apakabar*.

Servicing customer demand can take precedence over fear of government crackdown, in part perhaps because there is no clear policy or practice laid down by the government, but partly too because a certain conviction about the anarchic and individualist character of the Internet seems to permeate the discourse about the technology. At the level of the local Internet *warung*, the hand of government regulation rests lightly for the moment. Permits to open the Yogya Internet cafes were no more difficult to obtain than those required to open computer rental businesses which dot the surrounds of the campuses, providing hourly rental rates. Staff working at the Yogya public Internet access locations claimed that no clients had found access to their desired web sites blocked by outside intervention. Even Wasantara, which because of its association with the government's postal service might have been security conscious, required no independently verifiable details of users, no identity card (KTP) or address, and asserted that it did not block or monitor access to any sites, neither for political nor other reasons. At a personal level, we encountered a far greater concern about the political content of books we were air-freighting out of Yogya than we experienced in our almost daily usage of Wasantara's services.

Policy On The Net

There is a feeling within the media industry at large that the global communication technologies in the last decade have continually caught the New Order government on the backfoot—trying to regulate after the event, so to say.⁴⁶ This is in part due to the pace of technological change, which has left many regulatory bodies, national and international, behind. The Internet also poses a definitional problem in the context of the Indonesian government's departmental divisions: is it a broadcast medium, whose regulation in the context of Indonesia ought to be primarily managed by the

⁴⁵ Siar, "Kasospol ABRI Kumpulkan 83 Ormas dan Orpol Untuk Menggolkkan Keadaan SOB" on <Indonesia-L@userhome.com>, February 23, 1997.

⁴⁶ See Krishna Sen, "Changing Horizons of Television in Indonesia," in *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, Special Double Issue, 22 (1994): 116–124, for discussion of regulation of global television in Indonesia.

Department of Information (Departemen Penerangan, henceforth Deppen), or is it an extension of the postal service, in which case it would fit under the jurisdiction of the Department of Tourism, Post, and Telecommunication (Deparpostel)? The Internet, like radio and television, has some connection to both Deparpostel and Deppen. But institutional histories of the two older electronic media, going back to the beginning of the New Order, have given the primary responsibility for regulation of these to Deppen. In the case of the Internet, the departmental arrangements seem as yet unclear.

The departmental division corresponds to another tension within the Indonesian bureaucracy—one generated by the contestation over how to respond to the ideas and technologies of globalization. This is a separate topic which cannot be dealt with here in any detail. But globalization as an inexorable force is perhaps the single most repeated theme in ministerial speeches and policy statements in Indonesia in the 1990s. Examining these pieces of evidence, it is possible to tease out two contradictory responses: on the one hand, the army and other security-related departments seek barricades against global influences; on the other, the economic and development-related ministries perceive many aspects of globalization as new openings for growth and development. In this very rough schema, we can see that Deparpostel, with its primary function rooted in international services (tourism, post, telecommunications) and infrastructural development, falls mainly into the latter category. Deppen, one of the powerful ministries of the early New Order period, responsible for censorship and propaganda, falls much more into the former category. For instance, Jonathan Parapak, the Director General of Telecommunications, in a recent vision statement, refers to globalization as “mutual dependence and mutual influence globally.”⁴⁷ In comments emanating from the Department of Information, however, globalization is most often employed as just a new name for “foreign cultural penetration,” a theme frequently used by dictatorial governments to legitimize censorship. For instance, introducing the draft Broadcast Laws before the full sitting of the Lower House (DPR), the Minister of Information commented on the need for certain regulations so that “globalization of information through radio and television broadcast is not freely received at all layers of the Indonesian society which in the long term can kill the development and the role of national broadcasting, along with influencing Indonesian national values.”⁴⁸

Caught between two discursive positions, the Indonesian government, like many others in the region, is simultaneously driving to enable an expansion of computer networking capacity, while at the same time, trying to control the informational content on the Internet. Deparpostel, under Minister Joop Ave, has embraced the information technologies and their economic potentials with evident enthusiasm. The Department of Information (Deppen), under Minister Harmoko (who also heads the New Order’s electioneering machine Golkar), and the Ministry of Defense and Security (Hankam), under Minister Edi Sudrajat, are primarily concerned with regulating, monitoring, and controlling the channels of information opened by new technologies.

⁴⁷ Jonathon L. Parapak, “Tinjauan Aspek Regulasi pada Teknologi Multimedia,” written notes for a speech given in Jakarta, December 17, 1996.

⁴⁸ Harmoko, *Keterangan Pemerintah Dihadapan Rapat Paripurna Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia Mengenai Rancangan Undang-Undang tentang Penyiaran*, Parliamentary address, DPR, Jakarta, May 6, 1996, p.13.

Obviously to provide Internet services, the ISPs needed to work closely with PT Telekomunikasi Indonesia (Telkom), the national telephone network, and PT Indosat, the state's international telecommunications carrier, both of which are under the authority of Deparpostel and amongst the earliest government enterprises to be partially privatized.⁴⁹ In a 1996 table of the country's largest and best performing publicly listed companies (*SWA100*, 4th edition), Indosat ranked fourth and Telkom (the larger and older company) fifty-first.⁵⁰ Joop Ave has announced the government's intention to accelerate the pace of infrastructural development of both cable and satellite networks for information technology.⁵¹ In early 1996 PT Pos Indonesia, the postal service privatized in June 1995, joined with Telkom, the largest publicly listed telecommunications company, and STT Telkom (Sekolah Tinggi Teknologi Telkom, Telecommunications Technology College) to establish Wasantara.net to offer Internet services initially in the high-volume provinces and eventually throughout the country, with local nodes in every provincial capital and other major cities. Pos Indonesia had been using Internet internally from about 1988. Around 1993 it began exploring the possibility of offering public Internet services. Plans emerged for *Warpostron* (electronic mail kiosks) to be established at post-offices, paralleling existing arrangements for long-distance fax and telephone facilities.

While the Internet boom is being driven by the private sector, Deparpostel is facilitating expansion. In 1996 the two dozen listed ISPs were encouraged to form an Indonesian Association of Internet Service Providers (Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia, APJII), through which the government would negotiate with the industry. In consultation with APJII, on July 30, 1996, the Minister established a tariff scale of minimum and maximum charges for Internet services, to avoid excessive competition effective from January 1997.⁵² Deparpostel is overseeing a period of massive infrastructural developments, notably exponential increases in the number and variety of telephone services available to consumers. Since the beginning of deregulation of telecommunications in 1993, every new tendering for ever more advanced devices brings out the who's who of Indonesia's politico-financial high-fliers. For instance, a tender called by the department for provision of a Personal Communications System (a new generation digital telephone) in late 1996 reportedly drew bids from a son, a daughter, and two other relatives of the President, sons of two current ministers and one former minister, and several other prominent business groups.⁵³

⁴⁹ See Jay Solomon "A Private Affair: Indonesia's 1997 state sell-offs may only benefit the few," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, January 30, 1997, posted on <indonesia-p@igc.apc.org>, on February 5, 1997.

⁵⁰ "100 Perusahaan Terbaik 1996," *SWAsembada*, August 22-September 11, 1996, pp. 16-19.

⁵¹ "HP World '96: Joop Ave," p. 119.

⁵² M. Fadhilah Zaidie, "Tarif Baru Internet," *Tirias*, August 22, 1996, p. 27.

⁵³ Firms registered with Deparpostel in the pre-qualification process for such tenders include those associated with Mamiel Suharto (President Suharto's daughter), Sudwikatmono (Suharto's foster brother), Probosutedjo (Suharto's half-brother), and Ari Haryo Sigit (Suharto's grandson), Soesilo Soedarman (Coordinating Minister for Political Affairs and Security), Let. Gen. (Ret.) Sugeng Subroto (Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defence and Security), Hartini Soekarno (wife of former President Sukarno), Rahmi Hatta and Nelly Adam Malik (wives of previous vice-presidents), Isfan Fajar Satryo Try Sutrisno (son of the Vice President), Pontjo Sutowo (son of Ibnu Sutowo, the discredited multi-millionaire former head of the state oil company Pertamina), and Thareq Kemal Habibie (son of Minister Habibie).

The 1997 *Indonesia Country Commercial Guide* (prepared by the US Embassy in Jakarta for US business) lists "Telecommunications" amongst the nation's "principal growth sectors" and ranks computer systems and telecommunications equipment as respectively first and tenth under the category of "Best Prospects" for American exports in the "non-agricultural sector."⁵⁴ The global telecommunications revolution which arrived in Indonesia in the early 1990s has thus transformed Deparpostel from the much criticized government service provider, to one of the significant economic ministries managing the cutting edge of global technology. The Internet itself is a relatively small part of this burgeoning empire, but one that enjoys incidental growth as the whole digital telecommunications sector develops.

For the Armed Forces and the Department of Defense and Security (HANKAM), the only significance of the Internet seemed to be its potential political use. Spokesmen for the Armed Forces have expressed concern at the Internet's potential to undermine national cohesion by permitting unfiltered access to information beyond the control of the state. Lacking the capacity to block out or censor the output of this new technology, they attempted counter-propaganda on the Internet. In October 1995 Air Marshall (Marsekal Pertama TNI) Sri Diharto, Head of the Armed Forces' Headquarters' Centre for Data Collection and Management (Pusat Pengumpulan dan Pengolahan Data Mabes ABRI), who holds an ITB Masters degree in Electronics, announced the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) had established a special Internet unit, with seven staff members, to go on-line as "HANKAM/ABRI-net" (established on RADNET).⁵⁵ The stated aim was to correct inaccuracies (with the example given of a CIA Home Page incorrectly listing civilian Minister for Information Harmoko as a retired lieutenant) in international information about Indonesia. Many believe that ABRI-net's real targets were mailing lists such as *apakabar* that carried dissenting Indonesian voices, rather than fragments of misinformation distributed to foreigners.

Opening with an address by Defense and Security Minister Edi Sudradjat titled "HANKAM/ABRI-NET answering the challenges of the era of globalization," the homepage was a bland and uninformative restatement of the structures of the Armed Forces and the Department of Defense and Security, listing various duties and responsibilities. The site was rated poorly as boring and out-of-date in its news coverage by Internet commentators.⁵⁶ It is widely assumed by political activists,

former head of the state oil company Pertamina), and Thareq Kemal Habibie (son of Minister Habibie). See Batur Srihandajani, "Uji Coba untuk Mamiek," *Tiras*, August 22, 1996, p. 26 and "Official expects cellular tenders to be transparent," *Jakarta Post*, August 9, 1996, p. 12.

⁵⁴ *Indonesia Country Commercial Guide, Financial Year 1997*, prepared by US Embassy, Jakarta for the Trade Coordinating Committee, United States Government, posted on <apakabar@clark.net>, February 20, 1997 and available on <<http://www.usia.gov/abtusia/posts/ID1/wwwwhcg97.html>>.

⁵⁵ "Perangi Info Sampah ABRI Masuk Internet" *Republika*, October 20, 1995, and posted that day on <apakabar@clark.net>; and "Gosip Politik, Berdagang, Sampai Artis Telanjang," *Gatra*, December 2, 1995, posted on <apakabar@clark.net> on November 28, 1995. As noted on <apakabar@clark.net> (January 19, 1996), an identical military homepage, HANKAM/ABRI-net ("Hankam" being the Indonesian acronym for the Department of Defense and Security; ABRI meaning "Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia"), can be found at both following addresses: <www.abri.mil.id> and <www.hankam.go.id>.

⁵⁶ Suryo, "Kemana setelah 'apakabar' ditutup," p.10; "HANKAM/ABRI-NET Tantangan globalisasi," *Kompas*, January 24, 1996, p.17; Herman Sulistyono, "ABRI, Internet dan ketahanan nasional," *Kompas*, February 3, 1996, p.4.

however, that much of the pro-government material placed on popular bulletins boards or mailing lists, like *apakabar*, is also the work of staff of the Internet unit and is part of their covert counter-information strategy, or what one columnist described as "ABRI's 'Information War' in Cyberspace."⁵⁷ As Air Marshal Diharto declared, tacitly acknowledging that the armed forces had been caught ill-prepared by the Internet "revolution," "This is the era of globalization and information, and we have to take advantage of this. If we do not, we will be left behind."⁵⁸

The Department of Information which has formal responsibility for the content on the Net, has been even slower to react. The current Minister of Information may well be better known for banning, censoring, and accumulating shares in the media than for imaginative policy initiatives. Some of the department's senior bureaucrats who had overseen the restructuring of television in the 1980s had left the department by the 1990s, when the Internet came into comparatively widespread use. Most importantly, the department, accustomed to dealing with broadcast media such as radio and television, seems to have had some difficulty coming to grips with a medium whose broadcast capacity exceeded all other media (since any message can be sent, simultaneously and instantly, throughout the world), but which could simultaneously "narrow-cast" down to a single individual. For instance, the *Kompas* home-page can be accessed by anyone with a computer, modem and phone line anywhere in the world, but a mailing list such as *KdPnet* is targeted to a select range of individual addresses in perhaps a dozen different countries.

The Broadcast Bill, currently awaiting Presidential enactment, gives some indication of the confusion over the Internet. When Deppen's draft of the Bill came before the Parliament in May 1996, the Internet was not even mentioned. The Bill had been drafted to regulate the conventional electronic media: radio and television. During lengthy discussion in the House Committee, which went on till December, members attempted to write the Internet into the existing structures of control that operated for radio and television. The term "Internet," however, is not mentioned. It is collapsed under "*jasa layanan informasi*" (informational services). The majority of provisions of the act, having to do with the restriction of broadcast area, language of broadcast, proportion of foreign material broadcast, and so on, are entirely incompatible with the way the Internet works. It is also not clear whether the "*lembaga penyiaran*" (broadcast organizations), which according to the bill are to be principally responsible for broadcast content, refers to the ISPs which carry the Internet information, or to the individuals or institutions that maintain home-pages or moderate mailing lists. As far as the Internet is concerned, in its present form, the Bill is most probably unenforceable.

Deppen officials participated in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) regional discussions in Singapore in September 1996 regarding Internet control but, while the Indonesian Information Ministry expressed support for the principle of strict control agreed upon in such forums, it seems unlikely that this agency has as yet the

⁵⁷ Atantya H. Mulyanto, "Cyberspace: ABRI dan 'Perang Informasi'," *Republika Online*, October 17, 1996 (posted on INDONESIA-L).

⁵⁸ "Perangi Info Sampah ABRI Masuk Internet" *Republika*, October 20, 1995, and posted that day on <apakabar@clark.net>.

legal or technological means to enforce direct monitoring of Internet usage, or official restricting of particular sites, that can be undertaken by the Singapore government.⁵⁹

Legal structures do not of course indicate the real extent of state intervention in Indonesia. Much of the monitoring and censoring of communication is done covertly and outside the visible government institutions. In the days and weeks after the July 27 incident, suspicions were rife that Internet messages transmitted both within Indonesia, and, more particularly, to the outside world, were being monitored and interfered with. In Yogyakarta on the morning of July 27, after the dawn raid on the PDI headquarters in Jakarta, some users experienced problems accessing the Internet through the UGM server, Gama-net. The English-language *Jakarta Post* daily paper ran a number of letters to the editor complaining about interference of various kinds to Internet over this period. However, Indo-Internet, named in these complaints, denied political intervention and declared the "incident was purely technical."⁶⁰ One computer column in *Media Indonesia* daily warned of the dangers of "letter bombs," which could cause an ISP to overload and crash by forwarding massive amounts of correspondence to it. The fact that three servers, IdOLA, IPTEKnet, and Wasantara-net were "down" for various periods in early August and hence unable to function was judged by some to have resulted from "letter bombs" sent by unspecified sources. On August 4 an assistant to the Minister for Research and Technology notified network supervisors using IPTEKnet that the collapse of the server which had stopped all its Internet traffic in the last week of July was apparently caused by a "letter bomb" overflowing the hard disk server at the Department's BPPT.⁶¹ The timing of these incidents, whose net effect was to block Internet traffic in and out of Indonesia within days of the July 27 incident, inevitably caused suspicion that sections of the security apparatus striving to stifle information had engaged in foul play.

Older methods of intimidation also came into practice to limit the use of the Net, but only, it seems, when dissident views threatened to spread from the Internet into the wider community. In early August, in what is believed to be the first case of its kind, the police in Yogyakarta detained a lecturer at a private Christian university, Universitas Duta Wacana, for downloading and distributing, in print form, material from the Internet which was deemed discrediting to the government—"laporan dalam nada minor" in the euphemism of one newspaper. The academic was released without charge.⁶² But the case may be an indication of the limits that the government is seeking to set for the politics of the Internet.

ISPs are reluctant to confirm whether they have been asked explicitly or expected implicitly to block public access to any particular sites or types of information. The industry has the technology to monitor the traffic of information on their lane of the superhighway. ISPs could monitor which sites their clients connect to and in most cases what messages (that is, all except encrypted ones) flow via their e-mail addresses.

⁵⁹ "ASEAN setuju memblokir Internet," *Kompas*, September 7, 1996, p. 3; Watts, "Net users' free speech curbed," p. 22; and Rodan, *Information Technology and Political Control in Singapore*.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Sundararajan, "Indo-Internet," *Jakarta Post*, August 12, 1996, p. 4, and Sanjaya, "Technical problem at IndoInternet," *Jakarta Post*, August 16, 1996, p. 4.

⁶¹ RM Roy Suryo, "Awat Bom Surat di Internet," *Media Indonesia*, August 22, 1996, p. 21.

⁶² "Ditangkap karena Sebarkan Berita Lewat Internet," *Media Indonesia*, August 10, 1996, p. 20.

It is possible, for example, to sit in the computer room of an ISP and watch on screen the log of traffic through the ISP second by second. While the technical capacity for such monitoring exists, the effort involved in actually spying on Internet communication seems considerable, and ISP technicians we spoke to were adamant that this was not their concern. On the other hand, as with many newspapers and television stations, there are always rumors that informants and security intelligence staff are employed within the ISPs to monitor information and report to the Department of Information. One can read in Chapter X of the Broadcast Bill an attempt to legalize this mode of surveillance. Titled "Investigation" the section states "Apart from the police . . . particular civilian employees of departments whose work and responsibility involves broadcast, are given special authority as investigators under Act No. 8, 1981 of the Criminal Code [Hukum Acara Pidana]."⁶³ The civilian investigator's duties start with "receiving report or complaint from individuals regarding criminal acts in the area of broadcasting" and include questioning and finger-printing the suspect. This section was retained despite the strenuous objections of the PDI representative, who sought to restrict criminal investigations to the police department.

One ISP executive acknowledged that informal overtures have been made by members of a government department hoping to limit access. These instructions were couched in the euphemisms so common in the print and electronic media, asking for the companies to be "responsible" and act in the so-called "national interest." Some unspecified sites had indeed been blocked on occasion, though we could get no detail of which or why. APJII has a policy (not as yet formalized in print) which encourages members to blacklist individuals who have been found to be engaging in activities that work against the interests of the APJII (such as hacking) or that are deemed illegal (such as "subversive" political acts). Censorship in the Indonesian media has been effective in large measure due to self-censorship within the industry, rather than through consistent government action. To what extent this will work in a new industry, whose global *raison d'être* is unhampered flow of information, is difficult to predict.

Local Politics, Global Information

For the moment Indonesian citizens, living in Indonesia, can and do say anything they like in Indonesian language, and in English, on the web-sites and mailing lists located on ISPs in various parts of the world. But clearly the relation between the freedom of speech on the Net and democracy at the level of the Parliament and the streets of Indonesia is tenuous. In this last section of the paper we look at the Internet accounts of riots in a small town in Java, in order to understand the extent to which the Internet may become a medium in which to build up a story—an interpretation of the events—which is qualitatively different from that offered by the national media.

On October 10, 1996 when the curious trial of a Muslim accused of insulting Islam in the East Java provincial town of Situbondo brought down a verdict deemed insufficiently harsh by the thousands of the faithful in attendance, their anger spilled out into the streets and was directed at the minority Christian community.

⁶³ Undang Undang Penyiaran, Bab X, Pasal 62. (Broadcast Bill, chapter X, Clause 62)

Indonesian national dailies carried the news on the morning of October 12 after the press had been briefed by the Secretary of State Moerdiono. The leading daily *Kompas* published a report of the briefing on its front page, followed by its own coverage of the riots in Situbondo. In terms of material information about the incident *Kompas* reported that two thousand to three thousand people from Situbondo and neighboring towns had run amuck after the court brought down what they saw as an inadequate sentence against blasphemy. As for the damage, "cars and several buildings were burnt, including the district court. . . . Later the crowd attacked and burnt other buildings in Situbondo and surrounding townships, including schools, churches and a Chinese temple."⁶⁴

Meticulously attentive to certain, limited categories of detail, the article identified all but one of the eight motor vehicles the crowd had burnt, but it did not give any detail of schools or churches that had been destroyed or even name the towns affected, other than Situbondo. Through the following week, *Kompas* carried either news or editorial pieces referring to the Situbondo affair almost daily. But all of the stories emanated from Jakarta, and were made up of reactions of ministers and social commentators about ways of preserving national and social harmony. Even the coverage of the investigatory visit to the area by Komnas HAM (the National Human Rights Commission) did not generate any further detail about the incidents in East Java.

On the Internet, by contrast, an enormous amount of local detail emerged. Within a day, the umbrella organization, the Surabaya Christian Communication Forum [Forum Komunikasi Kristiani Surabaya, FKKS], which brought together a diverse range of Christian organizations, institutions, and foundations in Surabaya and East Java,⁶⁵ had circulated a statement addressed to the world Christian community via an American-based Internet homepage, FICA-net. The statement was picked up the following day by *apakabar*. Over subsequent weeks, the FKKS placed several statements and declarations regarding the Situbondo incident on the Internet. Initially these appear to have been sent from individual e-mail addresses, but by the beginning of November they originate from (what appears to be) the FKKS institutional address <fkks@indo.net.id>.

The FICA-net reports gave graphic details of the riots, which started in Situbondo around ten in the morning and by afternoon had extended to the neighboring towns of Besuki (twenty km away), Penarukan, Asem Bagus (thirty km away), and Wonorejo. The rioters had desecrated or destroyed twenty-four churches, a Buddhist temple, four Christian schools, and a Christian orphanage. The buildings and their location were spelled out in the report. Five people had died: a Christian minister and his family, including a six-year-old child. A chronology placed on the FICA-net on October 16 contains an hour-by-hour account of the incidents down to the anti-Christian slogans

⁶⁴ "Pemerintah Sesalkan Kerusuhan Situbondo," *Kompas*, October 12, 1996, pp. 1 and 15.

⁶⁵ FKKS included the following organizations: PGI (Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia); PII (Persekutuan Injili Indonesia), DPI (Dewan Pantekosta Indonesia), GGBI, BAMAG (Badan Musyawarah Antar Gereja), PIKI (Persatuan Intelelegensia Kristen Indonesia), PARKINDO (Partisipasi Kristen Indonesia), GMKI (Gerakan Mahasiswa kristen Indonesia), GAMKI (Gerakan Angkatan Muda Kristen Indonesia), Perkantas (Persekutuan Kristen Antar Universitas), LPMI (Lembaga Pelayanan Mahasiswa Indonesia), Yayasan Persekutuan PA Lahai Roi, GPPS (Gereja Pantekosta Pusat Surabaya), and GBIS.

chanted by rioters, which included remarkably enough: "Bunda Maria PKI" (Mother Mary is a Commie)!

On October 17, the FKKS addressed a letter to "the Christian Community around the world" (Masyarakat Kristiani di seluruh dunia), asking for their prayers and financial support. Having appeared immediately on FICA-net, with the note "After receiving this letter, please circulate it to other colleagues in your area. Thank you." (Setelah menerima surat ini harap menyebarkannya ke rekan-rekan lain di daerah Anda. Terima kasih.), it was posted on *apakabar* on October 22. All FKKS postings referred to so far are retrievable within minutes (if not seconds) via Internet from Perth, or any other point on the Internet, as easily as from Surabaya.

Details continued to be updated over subsequent months (the most recent one transmitted as this article was being written appeared on January 12, 1997). The site contains more than seventy photographs of the incident, a detailed chronology, a list of newspaper articles in English and Indonesian about the incident, messages of concern placed on FICA-net, information about "prayer action," "observations from project Open Book" (which included eye-witness accounts from the area), and details for those who wished to send donations to the victims.

The Internet acted also as a forum for arguments and debates.⁶⁶ "Jelantik Padmono" <jelantik@indo.net.id> (whom we assume to be an individual) also listed details of the Situbondo riots on another Christian mailing list, *paroki-net*, on October 11, which appeared the next day on *apakabar*, and sparked some spirited responses from individuals identifying themselves as Muslims. "Gagak Rimang" <gagakrimang@hotmail.com>, (October 13, 1996), questioned the emphasis on church burning in the Internet reports of the incidents and sought further explanation of the local issue that had triggered the incident: "Apa sih masalah yang ada antara Pak Soleh [the man charged with defamation] dengan Kyai Arsyad [the highly regarded local Kyai deemed to have been defamed]?" (What is the problem between Soleh and Kyai Arsyad?) "Muaz" <muaz@indo.net.id> put postings on both on *apakabar* (October 13) and on the <is-lam@isnet.org> mailing list (October 14) (which appeared the following day on *apakabar*) criticizing the emotionalism of the FICA-net reports. He also explained the actions of rioters in terms of the anger felt by the local population at the insult to a revered figure. Apart from the obviously partisan accounts of FKKS, the Internet thus became, also, the place to query and test what happened and why *in and around* Situbondo.

Our point here is not that these local details are any more true or valid than the news covered by the formal news media, but that the "local"—local detail, local voices, local accounts and opinions—simply disappeared from the formal media, replaced by generalized, standardized views from the capital. On the Internet, however, local knowledge by-passed the national media and went directly global.

As an FKKS spokesperson explained,

For several reasons, almost all of the information which the FKKS placed on Internet was not published in the ordinary mass media (press, TV, radio). None of our publications, including the Chronology of Events, Statements of Concern, and

⁶⁶ See, e.g., "Kampret" <jonix@aol.com> on October 13, 1996.

other reports ever appeared in the mass media, although we sent copies of the manuscripts by fax to the media. The FKKS is known by the world Christian community precisely through the Internet. They can get frank [*lugas*] news reports from FKKS publications on Internet about the damage which occurred to churches recently, which was not reported in detail in the conventional mass media.

Sometimes Indonesians in Indonesia who can only get access to TV, radio or newspapers do not get complete information about the destruction which occurs, for example, the number and name of churches which fall victim, or the *modus operandi* of the destruction. For example, the destruction of ten churches in Surabaya on June 9, 1996 was not given any mention in the domestic mass media; evidence of very effective press control in Indonesia.⁶⁷

There were occasions when FKKS was mentioned in the national press,⁶⁸ but only in passing as an interested party, without reference to the detailed documentation it had compiled or the numerous public statements it had released.⁶⁹

There are indications that the interest in the Internet is spreading in the minority Christian community in Indonesia. The 1996 General Assembly of the Indonesian Alliance of Churches (Persekutuan Gereja Gereja Indonesia, PGI), opened by the President himself on November 9, included a series of seminars. Apart from topics related to practice of the faith, the seminar program also included talks by the Minister of Religion Tarmizi Tahir, the Commander of the Armed Forces Gen. Faizal Tanjung, and interestingly, from our point of view, an "Introduction to the Internet" by PT Indosat.

Closing Questions

Indo.net serves FKKS, alongside large government departments like Public Works and the Jakarta City council, and giant multinationals like Fortune Indonesia (one of the biggest advertisers in the world). The same infrastructures which are required by big business for expansion and development are also those which can be utilized with equal ease by small, disparate groups within the community to disseminate their views and information. The importance of ensuring secure transmission of information via Internet, which stimulated the development of sophisticated encryption software (much of it available free via shareware) is equally as beneficial to political dissidents in Indonesia as to multinational companies.⁷⁰ Similarly, the human skills-base produced by the Habibie-driven technology training policies of the New Order has

⁶⁷ Personal e-mail correspondence with an FKKS contact person. Confidential, dated February 20, 1996.

⁶⁸ E.g. "FKKS Jatim Layangkan Pernyataan Keprihatinan ke Komnas HAM," *Suara Pembaruan*, October 23, 1996 <www.SuaraPembaruan.com/News/1996/10/231096/Headline/fkks/fkks.html> posted on Indonesia-P, October 24, 1996.

⁶⁹ E.g. a keyword search of the Indonesia-1/*apakabar* database (for "situbondo" and "fkks") produced twenty-six documents of which only five were newspaper reports and only one (noted in previous footnote) actually referred in any detail to the material produced by the FKKS. Most of the *apakabar* documents were those originating from the FKKS itself.

⁷⁰ Resistance Internetworks like PIJAR offer Public Key encryption to subscribers, while advertisements in the newspapers imply that businesses also prioritize security of transmissions. E.g. "InfoAsia on-line" advertisement, *Kompas*, November 21, 1996, p. 10 offers "Highest Security Level Protection" via an "encryption secure server."

produced the technicians who staff both the hi-tech offices in the skyscrapers of Jakarta and the stuffy backrooms that serve as home for the community action groups around the country. Smart university graduates are setting up ISPs like RADNET but also the "alternative" cyber-publications like *Tempo Interaktif*. The technology is even simple enough for self-educated amateurs to patch together their own computer networks.⁷¹ The speed of expansion of the Indonesian sections of the information superhighway, the amount and disorder of its traffic, seem to make policing it almost impossible. Seen thus, the Internet apparently breaches the censorship and restrictions on freedom of expression imposed by the New Order government.

On the other hand, the very fact that the government has not been much more determined in its attempt to clamp down on political dissidence on the Net may suggest that this vehicle of opposition is being treated as unimportant, at least relative to other modes of opposition confronting the New Order state in the 1990s. For instance, despite the banning of *Tempo* magazine in 1994, *Tempo Interaktif* is tolerated by the authorities, and it operates openly as a *bona fide* business, occupying a full floor in a multi-storey central Jakarta office, with about a dozen desk-top computers and as many staff. Its aggressive and controversial journalistic style together with its particular political history as the only mainstream publication to go cyber after being banned, has not provoked raids on its offices or seizure of its computers. Indeed the Department of Public Works Home Page even lists *Tempo Interaktif* alongside three other magazine under its "External Links!" By contrast, *Suara Independen*, the magazine loosely affiliated with the Alliance of Independent Journalists (Aliansi Jurnalis Independen, AJI),⁷² which has much in common with *Tempo Interaktif* in terms of its editorial line and even contributors, operating from unobtrusive undisclosed addresses in residential back streets of Jakarta, has been repeatedly raided by police. In November 1996, its printing press, whose location had never been disclosed publicly, was raided and the printers arrested. While the printers are currently undergoing trial, the magazine continues to appear on the *apakabar* mailing list.

The Internet is not, and will not in the foreseeable future, be available to the large majority of Indonesians, not only because of economic constraints but also because its usage depends on a degree of literacy, linguistic and technological. It is, in 1990s Indonesia, a tool—and a toy—for the mostly male middle-class professionals. Almost every recent book on Indonesian politics refers to this professional middle class, spawned by the New Order, but calling for change—for transparency, rule of law, and ultimately political democracy.⁷³ In their hands, the free speech of the Internet may become a political tool to achieve some of the political liberalization to which they

⁷¹ For example staff in the AIDS Media Centre at the Yogya Institute for Research, Education and Publication (LP3Y) with no academic training in computing technology successfully assembled equipment to run their AIDS bulletin board, which in October 1996 had over one hundred regular users, mainly health workers, doctors or journalists. For details contact <lp3y-aids@ins.healthnet.org> or <lp3yaids@yogya.wasantara.net.id>.

⁷² *Suara Independen* is formally published by MIPPA (The Indonesian Society for an Alternative Press), which uses a post office address in Australia. MIPPA, however, has a long and supportive symbiotic relationship with AJI, which was established by journalists after the June 1994 press bans.

⁷³ E.g. Robert Cribb and Colin Brown, *Modern Indonesia: A History since 1945* (London and New York: Longman 1995), pp. 149–151; and Michael R. J. Vatikiotis *Indonesian Politics under Suharto: Order, Development and Pressure for Change* (London, Routledge, 1993), pp. 96–99.

aspire. Alternatively the Internet may just act as a safety net within which this middle-class dissent can be contained, posing no danger to the New Order regime. The political function of the Internet in Indonesia will be determined, finally, not by the technology but by political agency. Meanwhile, for those interested in the democratic potentials of the Internet the place to watch is not the "Information superhighway through 850 gateways throughout the world" advertised by the ISPs offering gold and Platinum "Corporate Net" lines.⁷⁴ It is the wired *warungs* and their motor-bike riding clients who offer us by far the clearer picture of how the Net is being cast in Indonesia.

⁷⁴ See advertisement for Sistelindo (p. 13) and information on INDOSATnet outlined in "Didukung Citra, SDM dan Peralatan Canggih" (p. 76) in *Info Komputer*, special issue on the Internet [September 1996].

