



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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DEVLIN: Today is July 9th, 2009. I'm here in Jakarta, Indonesia, with Sarwono Kusumaatmadja. He has had a longstanding involvement with Indonesian politics, most notably as secretary-general of the Golkar Party, state minister for Administrative Reform and minister for the Environment under then-President Suharto, minister of Maritime Affairs—

KUSUMAATMADJA: Marine Affairs and Fisheries, actually.

DEVLIN: Under President Abdurrahman Wahid. Since then, he has been in the Council of Regional Representatives, Indonesia's highest legislative body. Sir, thank you for joining me today. Obviously your experience covers a broad swath of Indonesia's political history, so I was thinking perhaps the way we could begin is if I ask you to reflect on what in your eyes were some of the most important reforms that you put in place over the course of your involvement. Of course, a large part of your career was in the context of a system that was not so welcoming to reform. So part of the story may be reform that you tried to institute, but were not able for a variety of reasons. So if I could, broadly speaking, which would you identify as the key reforms or the stand out issues that you worked on.

KUSUMAATMADJA: There are a lot of those here, but maybe I'd like to concentrate on the seeds of political reform that I was a witness to during the early days of the new order, and how we worked on those early concepts when I was the secretary-general of Golkar, and then what went wrong, and how today's political scene is also partly a result of those concepts that we envisaged earlier, in the early days of the new order, especially in the late '60s and early '70s. These were the years when the basic concepts were mulled over and discussed and agreed on. Then it was in the late '80s and early '90s that we tried to give a body to these concepts. That's when I was the secretary-general of Golkar.

Then came the evolution of the Suharto regime, where the president became imprisoned in the world of temporal interests—let's call it that way—being brought about by his immediate clique, which was very conservative and corrupt, and how (Bacharuddin Jusuf) Habibie in defiance of all the expectations about him, relaunched the reform. So we end up with the things that we are in now. So coming back to the early days of the new order, Suharto was then newly installed as president after a very violent conflict, and he was surrounded by intellectuals as well as progressive military officers that recommended that Indonesia undergo reform towards more democracy in the future by getting rid of two things: first is the primordial ideologies, being the ideologies of the political parties and get them to operate in a more national and inclusive platform, and second is to simplify the organizational forms of our political system. He agreed to that.

So we began a political system using, if I may draw an analogy to a rocket, it is like a three-stage rocket. So the first thrust would be provided by the armed forces, which then was easily the most powerful and feared institution in Indonesia. Then the second stage of that rocket would also be augmented by the bureaucracy, and the third phase would be civilian politics. So we saw this practice being implemented in Golkar because when Golkar was first politicized in the late '60s, the Golkar leadership was purely military, ex-officio, so the general chairman of the Golkar was the assistant commander of the army in charge of political affairs.

DEVLIN: Kaster?

KUSUMAATMADJA: No, Asbin Sospol. Then in the regions, the assistant commander for Political Affairs became the chairman of Golkar, and so down the line. They were on active duty while leading Golkar. So the first election was an army-driven affair. That was in 1971. Then in the next stage, General Yusuf as the minister of Defense, chief of the Armed Forces at that time, issued a ruling that no active duty military officers would be allowed to be chairing any political party. So the second stage came in, where Golkar was led by retired officers of the army and assisted by the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy came as the administrative wing of the party.

Then in 1983, Golkar decided to become a political party which is based on individual and voluntary membership. That's when I became the secretary-general of Golkar. Suharto told us in a limited meeting of the Board of Patrons, that he wanted Golkar to evolve into a competitive civilian political party being able to compete in a multiparty system of the future. He said, "It's going to be a multiparty system once I'm not president any more. So we are going to phase out the army and the bureaucracy from Golkar." That's exactly what we did.

Apparently, he gave a somewhat different guidance to the armed forces. So there was a very hefty debate between us and the armed forces and the bureaucracy, which way Golkar should be going, because the army insisted that according to Suharto's directive, the driving force of Indonesia's politics would be the army. Of course we contested that. So after Golkar's successful victory in 1988, the army realized that Golkar was indeed becoming too civilian, and then they decided to take over Golkar leadership again by putting in a lot of young officers as chairman of Golkar in the regions, even forcing them to retire early. So we call it the "re-greening of Golkar." They went as far as destroying all our files in the headquarters of Golkar because it was the civilian political software that we put in there, and they deleted all electronic files, not by electronic means, by using hammers and—that was during Harmoko's time.

I think at that time, Suharto was playing a game of balance, trying to balance the army's interest with the growing civilian influence in Golkar, and so he did things by half measures. This lack of certainty of direction from Suharto resulted in a conflict between the civilians and the army within Golkar, but the bureaucracy was only too happy to be out of politics so they didn't intervene.

DEVLIN: So this stage in the '80s, when you talk of this phasing out of the army and bureaucracy from Golkar, what was the main motivation from then-president Suharto's point of view? Was it that he was looking to a political party that could compete after his tenure?

KUSUMAATMADJA: I think it has something to do with the kind of political education that he underwent when he was a young officer, because he told me and several other people that he was introduced to politics in a study group in Solo, I think, which met every Thursday, and it was heavily influenced by leftist politics, the socialists. There were two socialist camps operating in that study group: the right-wing socialists, which then became Partai Sosialis Indonesia (PSI), and left-wing socialists, which then became the communists. In that study group, everybody was there, civilian, the armed forces and political parties. That I think left an imprint on him.

Then he also entered the general staff college of the army which was then run by Lieutenant General Suwanto who was definitely a democrat and also had socialist party leanings. Then later on, he was influenced by Professor Sarbini

Somawinata, also somebody from the socialist party and Harry Tjan Silalahi, the patron of the CSIS (Centre for Strategic and International Studies) now. A lot of civilian politicians from the other parties as well, from the NU (Nahdlatul Ulama, a Muslim organization). So that group was his early advisors.

DEVLIN: So when you were chairman of Golkar there—.

KUSUMAATMADJA: Secretary-general.

DEVLIN: Yes, secretary-general, the initiative is introduced that Golkar is going to be reoriented to a civilian political party. The support for that, the coalition behind that change was solely President Suharto at the time?

KUSUMAATMADJA: And civilian politicians, the senior ones mainly from PNI and PSI and from Golkar, the campuses and from the general staff college.

DEVLIN: Why do you think this coalition for change within Golkar came together at that time and not earlier?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Because at that time Suharto was looking for ideas, and the two mainstream ideas that came into his head: one was direct military rule, which he rejected outright, and second is what we would call the middle way, partnership between the army and the civilian. He opted for this. He likened this partnership as the firing of the rocket with the three stages, firing of a three-stage rocket: first stage army, second stage is bureaucracy and then at the final stage when it self-propels as a civilian organization.

DEVLIN: So in a way, President Suharto had made it clear that this was going to be a moment, a window for change.

KUSUMAATMADJA: For change, yes.

DEVLIN: And people responded to that by—.

KUSUMAATMADJA: Responded to that, yes. During my time, we started recruiting into Golkar civilian elements, which did not belong to any political groupings. So we recruited people from youth groups, from labor groups, from professional groups.

DEVLIN: What kinds of bargains did you have to make in order to build that coalition?

KUSUMAATMADJA: No, it was just an exercise in future ideas.

DEVLIN: So in terms of building and maintaining support for this idea that Golkar should become a civilian political party, were there challenges to that?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Oh yes, as I said, apparently Suharto did not give exactly the same briefing to the armed forces, so they had reservations about this, and they thought that we were embarking on our own ideas and not necessarily adhering to the wishes of the old man. Typically, Suharto did not deny or confirm that that is the way that he liked Golkar to progress. So he left the conflict hanging. So there was bad blood between Benny Murdani and Sudharmono. I was caught in the middle because as secretary-general of Golkar, I was also the day-to-day chairman of a staffing committee called "Tiga Jalur". That staffing committee was composed of military, bureaucracy and civilian Golkar, and I had constant

quarrels with all these colonels and generals from the armed forces of the Sospol Abri and the intelligence. We had vicious debates.

DEVLIN: That sounds like an extremely challenging position to be in, the kind of indecisive message that was coming from President Suharto. So there's a message that change is underway, but different parties have been promised different things. How did you navigate that in your situation? The fact that you had a mandate from the president to some degree but it wasn't clear. There was no document you could point to.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *We made use of the fact that a lot of the elements of the army also disliked politics and they wanted out. So we made an alliance with them. We resorted to a lot of subterfuge and—.*

DEVLIN: Could you talk a little bit about how you managed that relationship with these groups in the army? Because I can imagine, it sounds like the bureaucracy, you are saying, were fine with removing themselves from the Golkar structure, but the army was the main opposition. So how did you identify the people in the army with whom you could work?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Suharto gave us help in the sense that whenever we had briefings with the Board of Patrons, he always invited a lot of army officers, which we found out were inclined to be friendly to us. We also found out that eventually these officers would wind up as the director-generals for political affairs at the Home Affairs office. So we worked through them. The sort of things that we did was not easily analyzed by conventional army minds, so they were a bit misled by us, and they only realized too late that we were charting our own course.*

DEVLIN: Does an example come to mind of one of these initiatives or tactics that you used that managed to kind of go around the opposition?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *I'd like to give an example. Whenever a province has to have a change of leadership, new governor, then our staff committee would set to work to begin a primary selection of who would be eligible as the future governor of that province. That has to be agreed to by the three components of that committee, the army, the bureaucracy and Golkar. The army would insist that so-and-so should be nominated, so we put their names down. But we made a separate list, also in consultation with the director-general of political affairs of the Home Office with different names, and that we gave to Suharto.*

DEVLIN: So you draw up an entirely different list?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Yes, and when the decision was reached it was too late for them to intervene.*

DEVLIN: How did they react in these situations when their—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Furious, but too late, because at one point we decided to do the nominations in one go to save time. So we had a list of future governors covering three years in advance, dozens of people were being proposed. So the army was satisfied with the list, and then they sat down and did nothing about it, maybe they gave the list to the headquarters staff for Benny Murdani. But we went straight to Suharto with the list. That's why it was very fortunate for us to have Sudharmono as our general chairman, because he was very close to Suharto.*

DEVLIN: So in these instances where you would effectively draw up your own list with the elements of the army that were supportive of change and then pass it to President Suharto, say a governor would be appointed through that method. The army would then—it would be extremely clear, as you were saying, that that person was never—.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *They were unhappy, but they were not in a position to resist because the final arbiter would come from Suharto himself.*

DEVLIN: But surely in that process, the people in the army who supported you were exposed.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *No. But then they would become high officers, which is also under the protection of Suharto, not necessarily having to defer to the commander of the armed forces. So we call it, we “de-Bennycized” them. Sudharmono would be with us, the Home Affairs minister and then Benny would be left on his own, so he had to resort to intelligence operations to set things right, but eventually Benny told me, “I don’t want to interfere too much in your affairs because it would be very unsoldierly of me to be dabbling too much in politics, so you have it your way, but I’m telling you it’s futile, it’s futile.”*

DEVLIN: So the elements in the army that were prepared to work with you, what did they want? Obviously, what you wanted and what they wanted couldn’t have fit exactly, there must have been a gap.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *They just wanted one thing: that Indonesia’s politics should be inclusive, non-racist, non-religious, pantheistic politics, let’s call it, and that any civilian political regime would have to understand the potential of the army’s role in the national integration, that they should not be neglected. That’s it.*

DEVLIN: What did your opponents in the army want? They wanted a tighter grip?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *More conventional army role in politics in the sense that they would have to control Home Affairs, they would have to control police.*

DEVLIN: You were already thinking of splitting military and police?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *They’d have to have a strong say in foreign policy.*

DEVLIN: Did you ever try to find a middle ground with that hard core of the army? Did you compromise on some issues?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *In a tactical sense, yes.*

DEVLIN: Do you recall any of those tactical compromises?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *In a tactical sense, yes, but I know very well that it is only tactical, it is a ruse.*

DEVLIN: Were any of those ruses particularly effective or would some not always work?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Very effective. I’ll tell you why. As one example, Suharto whispered to us, that was in 1993, that he wanted Sudharmono to be his vice president. The army was in the dark. They thought that Suharto was still favoring Umar (Wirahadikusumah). They didn’t know until the last moment that Suharto was*

very serious with Sudharmono. Benny Murdani was furious and he thought that he was let down by his own officers, which at that time were functioning as the DG in Home Affairs and his own political affairs director. Up to the last moment. He said, "Sudharmono, you're talking nonsense. Sudharmono is nothing, I can send a corporal to his house and have him arrested." I said, "No, General Benny, it is Suharto's decision to have him as vice president." "No, bullshit. I'm his closest adviser; I know very well, he is still with Umar."

"OK, let's reconstruct the whole thing from the beginning," I said. So I and Benny reconstructed the whole events leading to the appointment of, the vetting of Sudharmono as vice president. Then he looked at me and said, "Ah, you know," he said, "Why would Suharto want to double-cross me? He could have said from earlier on that he wanted Sudharmono as his vice president and I as a soldier would obey. Why all this double-crossing?" he said.

Then he asked me, "Have you talked to any of my officers about this?" I said, "No." So I shot back at him, "Have any of your officers talked to you about this?" "Come to think of it, no, I haven't asked them any questions because I took it for granted that they were still with me."

DEVLIN: So in the portion of the army that was supportive of this civilianization of the Golkar party, what could you do to accommodate them? They were a middle ground. There was a hard-core army position and there was a civilian position, and they were the swing vote in between, a crucial swing vote. What could you offer them? How could you make things a little more enticing for them, to encourage them? Were there certain issues that you could—I would imagine that you had to make a kind of calculation; you could give ground on some issues.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Well, it was like this. Whenever we review a candidate's list we would weed out people with undesirable ideological leanings, on that we agree. That reassured them. So at least the civilian Golkar is ideologically with us. So we brought the issue, we downgraded the issue into an issue of preferences rather than an issue of principle. Then we'd work out a 50-50 solution, but after the 50-50 solution, we were sure that we got about 80%, because some of the people we recruited from the army into these political positions were our friends in the first place.*

DEVLIN: So in a sense, by expanding the issue to whether or not you were aligned ideologically, which you were with these people, you could kind of distract them from tactical differences. So you found a strategic—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Yes.

DEVLIN: Okay.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Then we also know our network within the armed forces because in Indonesian politics at that time, and it is still true now, all would-be members of the elite would have to undergo a training in the National Defense Council, Lemhannas, and the training in Pancasila ideology and all that. So we have our network, we know who's who. I never joined the National Defense Council because when I applied to join the course the director of that council said, "What? You? Taking a course here? You'll be wasting your time, forget it, we know you, and that's enough for us. Don't join our classes, you'll be distracting them."*

DEVLIN: In terms of, I'm wondering—.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *We also assessed officers from their origins, because we found out that people from the navy and air force would be more liberal than the army and people from the special forces would be very army. People from the Siliwangi Divisions would be more liberal.*

DEVLIN: So was that a way you could work with people who you could describe as being from the armed forces but you knew were from units more—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Yes, so we had a human map so to speak. Our human mapping was quite good.*

DEVLIN: So armed forces representation would stay up, but just the exact people who that meant were changing?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *If you don't play with guns and bullets, it's quite easy to bamboozle the army.*

DEVLIN: Now I also, within the support for the civilianization of the Golkar party, on the civilian side of things, there must have been a whole range of people from different backgrounds. Now I'm wondering, how do you select whom you would work with? Without empowering the wrong type of people, because there's this dilemma where you need the support, but I imagine there were probably some individuals you didn't want to empower in that process.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *As you know the Golkar was the biggest organization at that time, and it was very close to power. It was not a ruling party mind you because when I was secretary-general, I also said that; "Golkar is not a ruling party, it is a party of rulers." So anyone who would want to be part of that ruling clique is recruitable. So you just dangle the promise of a high office in front of them and they comply. Then the rest is having a background check on them and that's it.*

DEVLIN: So if you have this problem where these people have very narrow motivation for joining the party, but I imagine some situation it is necessary to have these people. They have constituents, they bring them with them.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Yes.*

DEVLIN: How do you both include them so that you build this support, this critical mass, but also isolate them so they can't do damage to the policies you're trying to put in place?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Again, it's how you dangle the carrot in front of their nose.*

DEVLIN: Now what would you say, looking back on that whole process of civilianizing Golkar, what would you say were the main obstacles that came up along the way because I imagine it probably wasn't—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *It's office politics, rivalry.*

DEVLIN: Personal rivalry?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Yes, people wanting to recruit their own kind.*

DEVLIN: Could you talk a little bit about how you made the attempt to manage that, people wanting to—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: We had a discussion group, we bring people together and we assign them to deal with various topics, and ask them to present themselves. It's like an examination. Then we have a panel of people in order to see who the real talents are.

DEVLIN: So these are for assigning positions within Golkar?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Yes, as would-be parliamentarians, as would-be leaders of social organizations and all that. Of course, you're right, we have to make concessions with people with large and real followings. But I find it is interesting that if you sit down with them, exchange ideas, respect them, very often you find that their primordial frames of mind can very often be I've just posturing. You see? Because by and large, Indonesians tend to be moderate in that respect. So you would see somebody who you think would be a hard-line Muslim by the way he spoke and all that, but if you sit down, listen to him, ask him questions, and get good discussions with him, and go out to the dinner with him, you find that hey, he's different, see? I can with confidence say that prior to the Iranian revolution, by and large the Muslim mainstream were moderates.

Then we found out about these real hardliners after (Ayatollah) Khomeini came into power, and we were surprised because we didn't know; they sprang from nowhere, agitating in the streets and destroying things and putting up all these Khomeini posters and all that.

DEVLIN: Now I know it might be hard to ask you this right now, but I wonder if you could think of one particular—we don't have to go into the specifics of who or what area, but one particular challenge or most memorable challenge where there was someone who was in this bargaining position. I will bring you a constituency, I will bring you support, but I want this position, I want those resources, I want this. If you can think of a situation, one of the situations like that you've encountered, how do you begin to bargain with a person like that, or maybe alternatively, how do you give them what they want but then make sure that it doesn't have the influence it can?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Well, it so happens that most of my dialogues covering these topics was between me and Abdurrahman Wahid. So I had no difficulties whatsoever, because he was not asking for deals. He was only asking for participation for his people, and because I know his platform, it was very easy for me to accommodate whatever he wished at that time. Then by associating myself with Abdurrahman Wahid, Golkar automatically got the Islamic façade that it wanted without sacrificing too much. You know, as I said, it was very easy to deal with Nahdatul Ulama (NU) because basically NU is too Indonesian, they're not that fanatical, no, easy-going Muslims. We can get along with them very well.

With all the other mainstream Muslim elements, it was admittedly much more difficult. That's why they decided to form an organization of their own called the ICMI (Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals), you remember, because they felt that we were too accommodating to NU.

DEVLIN: So bringing NU into the Golkar fold, was that something you believed was critical to the successful civilianization of the party?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Yes. Then when ICMI was founded, I did go to Suharto to state my objections. That was after I became a minister; I was not the Secretary-General anymore. What Suharto told me was, "Look, we need to give a room for these people so that they can enter the room. That room is called ICMI, and when they enter the room, then we know what they're doing. So it is easier to watch them that way rather than ignore them. To assure you that my intentions are legitimate in the framework of Pancasila, I made sure that Habibie became the chairman of ICMI because Habibie does not know a single thing about religion. It is easy for me to appoint Habibie because his name is very Islamic, Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie. I can't appoint you as the general chairman of ICMI with a name like Sarwono; who is going to believe that you're a genuine Muslim?" But it's true, Habibie didn't know a single thing about religion at that time.

DEVLIN: So this is a recurring theme; it's very interesting. Suharto at the time had a rather unique role to play in government, a very, very powerful executive is perhaps an understatement even there. At times his instructions were ambivalent. He promised different things to different people. When you find yourself in that situation where your main support or main source of legitimacy, if you're carrying out a reform that has been broadly endorsed by him is shifting, or is changeable, how do you carry out your responsibilities?

KUSUMAATMADJA: I'll tell you: Once I asked him precisely about that. You know what he told me? "Never mind what I actually say to you. You have to believe in what I perceive to say to you and carry on from there." So I told him, "Sir, that means I'm taking a gamble." "Life is a gamble, don't you know that? Gamble away, hope for the best."

"So if you concentrate on what I actually said to you, you'll get nowhere, you'll get confused," he said. "Concentrate yourself on perceptions. Embark on a perception that you have faith in. Carry on from there. Remember I'm a president for everybody."

DEVLIN: So looking back on this experience of reforming the Golkar party into a civilian entity, what are some of the things you would advise someone who is trying to attempt something on that order of magnitude, or perhaps one may think of it as what would you have wanted to know when you first started that you only learned through these challenging experiences?

KUSUMAATMADJA: I'll tell you. I will first have to tell you on how I got into politics in the first place. It was in 1970. At that time, Golkar in West Java was short of candidates because nobody wanted to join their candidate list. All the politicians still preferred to run for their political parties. So the commander of Siliwangi at that time summoned seventeen of us student activists and gave us a Hobson's Choice, either to be arrested for inciting riots, or join the candidates list of Golkar. We were all given one week to make up our minds. So we had a discussion among ourselves and we decided that being parliamentarians was the lesser evil, because the reputation of the army detention center was not very good, so we signed in. We didn't even campaign, see? So we found ourselves in Parliament.

We hated politics at that time and we wanted out, we wanted to resign. So we got advice from a very senior politician. He said, "Look, please remember that the rulers are Javanese. They don't take kindly to people resigning from office, high office, like Parliament, because it is like refusing an honor. If you do that, they will be after you for all your life. Now," he said, "instead of doing a stupid thing like that, why don't all you young people formulate a platform for the future; make a

nuisance of yourself if necessary. Two things can happen. Either your concept would be accommodated, or you'll be kicked out of the party. That's preferable rather than resigning." So we did that.

So we found out who President Suharto's advisers were, what their thoughts and politics were, and then we elaborated on these concepts, and we aired them to the press. That made Golkar leadership furious. But when we spoke, then Suharto said, "Ah, these young guys, they understand me." So we were actually, the seventeen of us, summoned to the headquarters of Golkar to be held accountable for our press statements, and the seminars we held with so-called opposition groups and our presentation made a split within the board of Golkar. All the retired army officers were disgusted with us and wanted us to be kicked out, but the civilian wing of Golkar was pro-us and because there was no consensus on what to do with these seventeen people, they all came to Suharto. Suharto said, "These are young people, of course they think differently. Instead of wasting them away, why don't you make use of them?"

Then we became the think tank of Golkar from that point on. So nothing was deliberate in the sense that—I was educated as a civil engineer. I was a student activist, but we were all doing politics at that time because the whole social climate forced us to take political stance one way or another. But once everything was stabilized, we thought we could all go back to campus and resume our studies. If Golkar had a full candidate list, that would have been the case. We were not political in that sense. I think Daniel Lev wrote an article about the Bandung group calling them the politics of the unpolitical.

So we cooked up our political platform later in the game, because we had something to say which was different to the public, hoping, half hoping that because of that we'd be kicked out. Then we would all become accountants, engineers and lawyers as we had planned earlier. So there's nothing about this young, idealistic young people looking ahead and having a dream of the future politics of Indonesia, who they'd like, no. It's not that. It's like serendipity; you're finding new things as you go on.

DEVLIN: What was, in your later career, what were some of the main lessons you took from that experience, your rise through the Golkar party and then you're secretary-generalship?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *The most salient lesson that I've learned from life is don't plan your life. Take each day as it comes, make the best of it and make sure that you don't fall into the wrong hole.*

DEVLIN: So after your secretary-generalship of the Golkar party, as I understand it, you went on to become state minister for administrative reform. Now that is a position that is always challenging under any circumstances, and Indonesia being a massive country with a rather behemoth of a bureaucracy, you can say, I can only imagine the challenges were pretty daunting.

KUSUMAATMADJA: Yes.

DEVLIN: Could you maybe talk a little bit about what you viewed as your major challenges or what you wanted to get done when you first came into that position?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *When I came into that position, it was first underfunded, because the office had budget of only 300 million rupiah, and that was when the dollar stood*

at 1,600. It was neglected because the minister in charge for the past three periods were people from the technocrats, who didn't care a hoot about administrative reform. So I had more or less a clean slate. I formulated an eight-point priority of administrative reform, which people say has long-term validity. Also, the beginnings of regional autonomy was also one of the priorities, and then improvement of public service, and the idea of setting up bureaucracy on a meritocracy basis. So when I left the office the budget stood at 3 billion rupiah, ten times more.

I and my staff managed to set up the underpinnings of reform, which people say later on it has far-reaching implications.

DEVLIN: So you mentioned that you had an eight-point priority plan. I'm very interested in that. The regional autonomy was that one of them?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *One of them, yes.*

DEVLIN: So regional autonomy and the improvement of public service, meritocracy—.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Meritocracy and then the enrichment of functional positions vis-à-vis structural. So we decided to be very stingy on structural appointments and to make the bureaucracy more functional, function-oriented. Then we also embarked on an analysis of positions. So if the idea is for a bureaucrat to sit in office, there should be a manual on what he is supposed to be doing in that office, what his responsibilities are, what skills he would have to have and things of that sort. There were eight of them.*

DEVLIN: So you mentioned when you first came into the position, the previous ministers had largely been from the famous technocratic advisory—.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Sumarlin, Saleh Affif (among others).*

DEVLIN: And this was not a priority to them, administrative reform.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *No. Then I also appointed somebody to be the head of the civil service training institution. So I submitted two names to the president. One is a civilian who was an expert in public service, public affairs, French graduated. The second one was a military, a Ph.D. from the Monterey Navy university in California. You know what Suharto said to me? "Check off the Navy person, you don't want him. You don't want military people running government offices anymore." At that time, we did see a sign shift towards appointment of civilian bureaucrats.*

DEVLIN: So you're coming into this ministry, and it's, as you're saying, it does not have a legacy of being very effective on the topics it is supposed to address. How did you build support for your effort to reinvigorate its mission?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *You know, as the minister of state for Administrative Reform, I did not have any line authority. I was only supposed to draft, coordinate and urge people to follow the edicts in my office. I suppose I was listened to because I spoke about things that nobody had ever heard of and it sounded good.*

DEVLIN: That's an interesting position to be in. As you say, the state minister for administrative reform doesn't have line authority, so I imagine all your skill must have been at convincing people, building these coalitions.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Yes, selling my program.*

DEVLIN: Selling your program. But at the very same time, the program is oppositional towards a lot of interests that were built up. You're talking about meritocracy, regional autonomy. How do you begin to sell these reforms to institutions that have an interest?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *My policy at that time, it was because I realized that my office was politically weak. I made sure that I successfully sold my concepts to government institutions which were more likely to be friendly to the concept.*

DEVLIN: So you sequenced it with the easier ones first to try to—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *I concentrated on institutions in which I was more likely to succeed. That attracted the attention of the more, the dinosaurs, as I referred to them, Public Works, and Health and Education. Then I started to foment a restlessness within the ranks. Hey, since it happened over there, why are we—?*

DEVLIN: So what are some of these first, even if you call it pilot projects, that you looked at, the easier ones where you could get kind of more immediate results?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *For example, the Department of Manpower had a program in which they were assigned by the Ministry of Finance to work out a concept where bureaucrats would be familiar and had confidence in whatever they were doing because they were aided by a whole set of guidelines and manuals. Now because the Ministry of Administrative Reform at that time was a neglected office, nobody bothered to follow up on that program, it was neglected. So the Minister of Finance came to me and said, could you do something about that to liven things up over there? I said, "Sure." So I did. That got things rolling. That got some other departments interested.*

DEVLIN: So how did you, I'm wondering, in instances like that, how did you identify which units or which ministries you wanted to work with? Was it ones where you thought you could offer the most to them, or was it where individuals—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *I think my experience in politics contributed to that knowledge, because I was in Parliament since 1971, and I was the secretary of the majority party in Parliament and the secretary-general of Golkar, so I more or less knew who the progressives were and who the conservatives were, where the deadwoods are. I found out that people, if an office is mostly populated by young, well-educated people, then I would have a good chance of succeeding in that kind of social environment.*

DEVLIN: Did these pilot projects, did any of them succeed in your eyes or were the challenges just too great? Did any of them—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *I think the functionalization of jobs was successful, because it was tied also to remuneration. If you stick to your function instead of creating a structure in order to accommodate yourself. Because if you rely on structures, then you end up with a bureaucracy with so many overlapping authorities.*

DEVLIN: So on the topic of functionalization, do you recall, was there a certain ministry that you first applied those reforms to?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Education was.*

DEVLIN: The Ministry of Education?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Yes, because they had problems with teachers because the job of a teacher was not functionally well-defined, and there was no remuneration attached to just being a teacher. So you had to be a head of something in order to get more income. So we devised a system whereby a teacher could be promoted and were rewarded if he stuck to his functions as a teacher. That gained popularity and it stopped, at that time, it stopped the phenomenon of teachers getting restless and wanting out to seek structured jobs elsewhere. So we used to have a very serious case of bleeding, we call it, in the teaching faculty across the country because people who were first recruited as teachers because they found out the job of teaching was not rewarding. The first thing they did was to try and get another job where you have an official title. For instance, where you are rewarded with perks and all that and where your career path is clear.*

DEVLIN: So in order to professionalize that career path within the Ministry of Education, was it an oversight panel set up, or how was that functionalization done?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *We had an oversight panel set up in the ministry. So this kind of thing was overestimated by the establishment in any department because that's an idealistic thing to do, it will get nowhere so we'll ignore it. But then it grew into a very vibrant movement.*

DEVLIN: So once that started to gain momentum in the Ministry of Education and you realized that you had something that was working, you then looked to export it to other line ministries?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Yes. Then people would learn about it.*

DEVLIN: So what level did you go to? Say you have it at the Ministry of Education, it's working. Do you go say to the minister of Finance? Do you go—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Eat low on the food chain.*

DEVLIN: Low on the food chain is the way to go, eat low on the food chain.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Never mind the bosses, because they are there to sit and enjoy their privileges and do nothing. So why would you waste your time with them?*

DEVLIN: So what level did you go in at?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Third level.*

DEVLIN: Echelon three? That really is quite far down.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *To attend their meetings personally, not assigning it to my assistants. That's why people remember me up to today.*

DEVLIN: So you would come to these lower-level positions with the concrete result of education in this particular—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *This is your would-be manual if you professionalize yourself; these are the tools and these are the benefits that can accrue after so many years because*

you gain in knowledge and experience, and you can actually record what you know and record your experience. So you know exactly where you are at any given point. Then of course they know, that this is a different world than the one they're living in now. So I get very enthusiastic reception. So I concentrated on two offices in order to work, which one is the civil service administration agency, BAKN (Badan Administrasi Kepegawaian Negara) and second is the civil service training agency, LAN.

DEVLIN: Now this I imagine comes to a central dilemma. Say in this example of exporting professionalization of career paths. You come to whatever line ministry it is and you say "I have—," you come at echelon three. "I have this project that's working in the Ministry of Education, here are the results, it is legitimate." But I imagine some of the people you talk to like that, they're benefiting from an informal career system; it's patronage politics for them. How do you—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *I was fortunate because I had a very strong ally, Professor (Johannes) Sumarlin in Finance, (who used to be minister of Administrative Reform.)*

DEVLIN: In the Finance Ministry.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *He set up a budgetary reserve in order to support my initiative. So by having that budgetary support, you can immediately prove to whoever is interested that tangible benefits can actually be in their hands within months.*

DEVLIN: So it is a twofold thing, you professionalize and we can also—this won't come as their budgetary expense.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Right.*

DEVLIN: How did you win over Finance to that relationship? How did you build that alliance?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *I don't know, because perhaps after a time these technocrats realized that they were neglecting something. I had also very strong support from alumni of Sorbonne, because we sent out our bureaucrats to France in order to learn about administrative reform. When they came back from France, they found that they were not wanted, so I recruited them.*

DEVLIN: I'm wondering. From the point of view of the people in the ministries where you were trying to expand your programs to, did you present them with the choice where they would lose control over the professional ladder, because it would become professionalized and formalized, but you would provide them with enough budgetary support that they would still have the type of—.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Ties.*

DEVLIN: Now, this issue, and a lot of the reforms you mentioned that you were looking to do, the regional autonomy, this is meritocracy I guess, and this idea of phasing out structural appointments and focusing on functional appointments, in all of these issues, people stand to lose. They stand to lose power, that's really what it is. The regional autonomy from the center to the peripheral and in the meritocratic staff that's always superior to junior. How do you, what is it, what can you offer people? How do you bring people around to this idea, because ultimately they do stand to lose? Some one who puts these reforms in place is going to lose power over his subordinates.

KUSUMAATMADJA: When we're at that point; they have not come to that conclusion yet, because five years is very short. Maybe if I'd stayed there for five more years, I'd have problems, but at that time, everybody thought it was a good idea. Then the president moved me to Environment.

DEVLIN: Environment. So environment, your responsibilities in environment obviously were significantly different. But environment is very much an important portfolio here in Indonesia. Can you recall some of the challenges you had in mind going into that position?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Environment?

DEVLIN: Environment.

KUSUMAATMADJA: It came as a surprise for me, because when I handed down my report in the final days of my tenure at the Administrative Reform, suddenly the president said you don't have to think about administrative appointment anymore because I have a mind for you to be more involved in Golkar. So at that time, I had a feeling that he wanted me—he didn't want me in his cabinet. But then I heard from people that when the preliminary cabinet list was drawn and my name was not there, a lot of people started to remonstrate to Suharto to have me back in. So at the last moment I was invited back to the cabinet as minister of Environment. I didn't even expect that to happen because I was starting to get a new lease on life and find things to do in the private sector. But fortunately I was an avid reader of "National Geographic," so I always knew what I was going to do.

DEVLIN: So when you were in this position—

KUSUMAATMADJA: One of the persons who promoted me to that ministry was Emil Salim; he spoke to Suharto about me.

DEVLIN: Because he had formerly been minister of Environment himself?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Maybe.

DEVLIN: What were some of the reforms you looked to put in place in your tenure as minister of Environment, maybe not reforms, what were some of the challenges that you had to deal with?

KUSUMAATMADJA: I think to mainstream the idea that industry should take care of their own industrial waste and get them to compete for best performance. Second is to use electronic surveillance results as legal evidence of transgression in environmental management. I managed to do that so several plantations were prosecuted because of that. Then I formulated the new law on the environment in '97, which people thought was the best environmental law for developing countries at that time. What else? Oh yes, I also managed to form a very good relationship with NGOs, which was very handy for me because when the new order was overturned, I was safe from being harassed because of that—"oh, he's our man," (they would say).

DEVLIN: So all these initiatives, I guess what they share in common is the idea that you were going to put in place real oversight for the industry and its impact on the environment, which as I understand it was also something that President Suharto felt powerfully about on a personal level; he was invested in environmental

causes. But I imagine inevitably you must have come up against entrenched business interests and some interests that had close links to the presidency, very close links, sometimes family links. How, in that situation, do you carry out your job?

KUSUMAATMADJA: I always concentrate on the doable. So I knew that I had to make a move against his cronies, so I tried to find out who among the cronies were the most unaggressive and harmless and hammer them on the head day and night. People would say, oh, he's a brave minister going after that fellow. But that fellow is innocuous. He's just doing a business, contributing to the family, and he's not into any power games and all that. A good man. Unfortunately, his relationship with the old man is not very close, so I decided to concentrate on him. That leads people to think that I was not afraid of business connections in Suharto's family.

Ironically, because of that, the more powerful friends of the president started to try to be in my good books. Always, eat low on the food chain. Concentrate on the doable. I'll tell you one case. There was this paper magnate in North Sumatra. He had very strong relations with several ministers, and he even ran Emil Salim from his plant one day. He was using police and army to scare the people around his factory and he was polluting the river. So I sat down to figure out what to do with him.

I found out that he was negotiating with a financing company in Wall Street for a loan of US\$100 million to expand his business. So I told my people in the NGO community, including Greenpeace, they sent a message to that Wall Street fellow that that chap has problems with me because of waste management. So the message was given. Then the Wall Street said OK, we'll withhold all the remuneration until he is OK by you. So suddenly, this tycoon found out to his consternation that all his negotiations with Wall Street were stalled. See? Then when that happened, I told the minister of Industries, and I told Admiral Sudomo to lay off, I will now take care of him myself, not to harm him, but to make sure that he does a better business the next time around. Then I told Suharto, "Look, I want to try this. I'm going to give bitter medicine to this Chinese who is also your friend. This is my plan." So Suharto said, "OK, very good, give it a try, what can I do for you?"

"What you can do for me, Mr. President, is to tell his ministerial friends, Mr. This, Mr. This, to lay off and leave things to me." "OK, I'll do that." He called his adjutant and said, "Get me in touch with these ministers, I want to talk to them." So I sat and listened to the president giving instructions. OK, after that's done, then I unleashed a media complaint against him. So I met the people in his town to listen to their grievances and predictably enough, he felt he was being disturbed by this upstart minister and so he started calling his cabinet friends and he got no answer. The media kept their barrage to attack him from all corners and the communities were getting bolder, confronting the police and the army. Then he started to ask to see me.

I said, "Find an intermediary that I can trust." So he tried to find somebody, an interlocutor until we agreed on somebody to his satisfaction and to mine. That interlocutor was Yusuf Wanandi, who happened to be my high school teacher. So I told him, "Look, sir, tell your friend there he is to come to me, to listen to me and to heed my instructions. He is not to debate me or to go against me. If he agrees to those terms, he is welcome to come to my house with you." Three months no answer.

Then in the meantime he was befuddled because he lost his—he stood to lose his loan, suddenly his ministerial friends refused to entertain him, and after three months, he said yes. Then I know that he is a Chinese from North Sumatra, right? Now if you deal with the Chinese, wealthy Chinese from North Sumatra, you have to make sure when you meet him that he is under the wind, as we say it in the region, which means he has to be in an inferior position to you.

One of the ways for him to feel like that is to serve him dinner. So I served him dinner. He just collapsed. He said, “OK, minister, what you are to do?” “You are to this, this, this, this and this, five points. I’m going to appoint a consultant from the U.S. in order to make sure that you do it. Then next year you come and see me and see where we stand at that time.” Now he is one of the best performing companies in the region. He was very grateful. Then of course, you know, every Chinese would learn about that and they would come to me. “Please, minister, tell me what to do, my plant is being ransacked by the local community.” “OK, just listen to me.”

Then from that experience, we made a ruling, ministerial decree and all that. Then we ran a competition in order for waste management. Another chap in Solo, he was big in textiles, and he had a huge contract from Western Europe to make army uniforms and things like that sort. When I went to his town, I only had a police escort from the airport to my hotel, while he, this tycoon, had a whole cohort of special forces soldiers escorting him. So I told Prabowo (Subianto), “Hey, Prabowo, this is what happened to me yesterday in Solo. I think you should fire your local commander there.” He was fired the next day.

The fact that I managed to have a special forces commander fired scared them. Then I called the German embassy and said, “Look, your armed forces is about to sign a contract for so many thousand meters of army uniforms from that man who is polluting the environment there. Why don’t you convey a message to your government that I don’t like that, and if there is nothing done about it, I’ll get Greenpeace after you.” Then the inspector from the German army came to the plant and said, “Look, this doesn’t do it. We are going to cancel the contract unless you do something by this day.” Sure. So that kind of reputation makes things work, because all the industrialists will sense that oh, this guy, you don’t mess with this guy, he really means what he says.

DEVLIN: So it seems that in your capacity then as minister, there weren’t too many natural allies, there weren’t too many natural partners for you, but it seems by keeping, at least in that first instance in North Sumatra, keeping Suharto apace of things, keeping him informed of what you wanted to do was kind of crucial. Can you talk about how you approached managing his—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *He’s very interested in these techniques, because he is a soldier. He is very interested in tactics. So he said, “OK, this seems to be an impossible problem to solve. How would you go around it?” “See, this is my proposal Mr. President.” “Yeah, yeah, give it a try.” “I want to assure you, Mr. President, that in the end, it will do them good; they’ll do better business. He will be a better businessman without us losing their respect. So you can have your cake and eat it as well. So why don’t we have a try?” “Yes, why don’t we have a try?”*

DEVLIN: Now in both these instances, it seems like a popular constituency was important. In North Sumatra, you mentioned you brought the media in. With the textile magnate, somewhat differently, but you were talking about Greenpeace, you were talking about bringing Germans in.

KUSUMAATMADJA: And playing on Prabowo's stature as the commander of the special forces, implying that I don't like the way his unit behaves because they're acting like lackeys to rich people. Then, "I'll fire him the next day."

DEVLIN: So you were kind of insinuating that his own soldiers were more loyal to these business interests than the military structure. That was the type of man he was.

KUSUMAATMADJA: So the fact that I managed to have somebody fired from the special forces—

DEVLIN: It is a hard core of the military.

KUSUMAATMADJA: It is an awesome thing for the military. They were really scared of me.

DEVLIN: So on this, when you talk about involving the media and basically bringing outside parties to bear, it seems like it was the case in the Ministry of the Environment, and maybe if we think back a little bit to administrative reforms, the State Ministry there, what kind of steps did you take to build popular support, so say outside of bureaucracy, government, was that important for you?

KUSUMAATMADJA: It was important because again, the Ministry of Environment is not a line department; I have no authority, so I have to rely on strategic alliances with the public through the media. The media was also interested in helping me out. Why? Because the environment was a safe venue in order to vent your frustrations and your opposition to the regime, rather than human rights. You dabble in human rights and off you go to jail or you get kicked out. But if you deal with the environment, it's safe. You're brave, but you're safe.

DEVLIN: But I imagine there must be a challenge in managing that, because you can go outside to the public for support, but then the people you work with, the people especially you're working against, there's this suspicious atmosphere that you might go outside of the game, the political game, you're willing to—

KUSUMAATMADJA: I make sure that I don't overstep the line.

DEVLIN: What is, how—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: I'm fortunate in the sense that I inherited my staff from Emil Salim, who also had that kind of image, so I was continuing after him. So I had staff who were very keen to make themselves felt in their own fields. They were young, idealistic.

DEVLIN: So you mentioned that you're careful not to overstep the line when you talk about publicizing these disputes, these conflicts. How do you make that judgment? What is, what comes into that factor?

KUSUMAATMADJA: I guess it's a question of my exposure to things since the '70s, after twenty years in the game. You know, you'd sense.

DEVLIN: So what's the challenge, in some of the issues you're concerned about, in say the environment when you have this, one of the players is the public constituency. What is the challenge to maintaining that public support?

KUSUMAATMADJA: I found that, and I still find that people are interested in new information. So suppose you have a factory that is polluting the rivers, the ponds and the wells, and people are complaining. So I come to them and sit down with them and give them information on how to deal with this and how to make the factor compensate for all the disadvantages that are being brought to the community. So we talk about parameters and all that. I also found out that you should not underestimate people's intelligence. They have intelligence, they understand quickly.

So I leave the scene, and I leave a junior officer to oversee the planned action against the factory. It is like watching what kind of pollutants is being discharged, the volume, the chemical composition and all that.

DEVLIN: So in the example of this North Sumatran case that we talked about, it sounds like that was a challenge that stretched for many months. How do you keep people engaged in your cause there? How do you keep that alive?

KUSUMAATMADJA: It is a question of prospect of having that recalcitrant Chinese toe the line. Can he do it? It's not for me. Can we make him do it? We together, OK. So empower people. Make them feel, not only feel but make them realize that there is something they can do to better arrive.

DEVLIN: So it is this question you're saying, can we do it?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Can we do it?

DEVLIN: It's an interesting thing because you're not just saying this needs to be done, but you challenge, there's a challenge, is it even possible?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Again, I'm fortunate in the sense that environment is a very safe venue in order to vent your frustrations and anger and opposition to the regime.

DEVLIN: Now I'm wondering on this idea of the safe venue. You've tried, you've been involved with several reforms that didn't happen in these safe venues, that were more controversial. Are there ways that you can take a controversial issue and make it safe, that you can—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Yes, the rule of thumb is that if you take up an issue, you have to make sure that you have no personal things to gain from that. So you have to be seen as being selfless and so-called objective. You know the highest accolade that you can get as a public official is to be labeled as, oh, he's an objective fellow.

DEVLIN: One thing I'm very curious, just to skip back to administrative reform, you're tenure there. One thing you had mentioned that slipped me by but was very interesting is you said you managed to increase the funding available, drastically. You said the budget was underfunded. How was that possible?

KUSUMAATMADJA: As I said, the minister of Finance, maybe he finally realized that he was neglecting administrative reform, so he set up a special fund to support me.

DEVLIN: So it was part of that budgetary support that you had.

KUSUMAATMADJA: Yes. And I made sure that I appointed good people in at least two institutions that were under me, the training center and the civil service administration agency. So you don't have to work the whole spectrum, just

concentrate on what you will, in several meaningful agencies and that's it. So you have to realize that your time is limited, your resources are also limited.

DEVLIN: Now perhaps the greatest reform, or probably the most singular change that you've been a party to in your career was the transition from the era of President Suharto to the post-Suharto era. You memorably came out quite prominently. As I understand it you were the first cabinet minister to call on the president to offer—

KUSUMAATMADJA: *No, no, when I made that interview I was already out of the cabinet.*

DEVLIN: You were already out? OK.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *It was an accident, actually that interview. It was a comedy of errors.*

DEVLIN: How so?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *I was out of the cabinet at that time. Then Suharto found out that his cabinet no longer wanted to work with him, and he promised the public that he would set up a national reform movement and that he would form a new cabinet. But there were no takers for the reform committee as well as for the cabinet. So he instructed the media to embark on a campaign which says that every problem will be solved if the president could form a new cabinet.*

Now based on that, Suharto told his media officer that maybe Sarwono (Kusumaatmadja) would like to rejoin me in my new cabinet, so why don't you ask him to be interviewed on that? Because Suharto was assuming that everyone would want to be a minister. So I was contacted by SCTV; that was on Thursday. They said, "Pak Sarwono, would you like to be interviewed on the forthcoming cabinet reshuffle on Saturday at noon?" "Oh, of course, I'll be your very enthusiastic guest if you talk about the reshuffle."

So SCTV mistook my message, misconstrued my message, and they read it as Suharto read it, that I wanted to make an announcement stating my intention to rejoin the cabinet. So when I went to their studio at 11:00, I was given the red carpet treatment you know. "Oh, you'll save the day, we've been looking for people to support the president in reshuffling his cabinet and you're the first that we can get hold of that supports his idea." I said, "What? I'm here to refute that idea. I'm here to say that it is time that he steps down, that this reshuffle thing is no good." They said, "What?" I said, "Yes. OK, I'm the wrong resource person for you, then I'm going to go home, find somebody else." OK, so we said our goodbyes. But when I stepped out of the office there was BBC, CNN, ITN, waiting for me to be interviewed.

So I went back in and said, "Look, all these foreign journalists want to interview me, can I use your premises to hold my interviews?" "Oh, yes, by all means sir, go ahead." So I was interviewed by CNN, BBC, ITN. Somebody from the SCTV was listening in to the interview, and he ran back to the studio to say that the word is out internationally that he was against the reshuffle, and he is doing it in our premises, how come we didn't get any news from him? So I was called back in. They were pleading with me to go ahead with the interview. I said, "No. I'm not for the reshuffle, I'm against the reshuffle. I'm for the president stepping down."

"But we can't do that sir." "That's your problem, not mine. I want to go home." "But you did this interview with all these foreigners." "With your permission,

remember.” “Yes, we made a mistake there.” “OK, you have to live with your mistakes then.” Then we agreed that the whole interview would be changed, that we would not be talking about Suharto, we would not be talking about the cabinet reshuffle. But the one who was controlling the interviewer was not present when that decision was made. So he was assuming that the schedule had not changed. So he started hollering to this lady to get back on track. So she started to ask me about the reshuffle and Suharto.

I said, “Look lady, we had an agreement that we would not be talking about these things, how come you're asking me these questions?” Then we started a quarrel. I said, “OK, since you insist, I'll answer.” I said, “It's time he stepped down.” So it was a comedy of errors and somebody made a doctoral dissertation of it.

DEVLIN: So obviously a very tumultuous moment in Indonesia's history. But I'm wondering, when you think of the coalition that came around, that came together around the idea that President Suharto should resign, what were the bargains that were made in order to bring that group together, because it was a diverse group. A lot of people were brought together behind the sole idea that Indonesia needed to move on to a new system. So how were different groups accommodated in that?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *It was, nobody had an idea what to do, but eventually, I think the media dictated the team. The media was fed up with media control, they wanted freedom, and the Parliament was also fed up with the kind of regime that was holding down parliamentary powers. So everybody was thinking aloud on how to get freedom for their own. So all this, while the ideas were patched up into one, it became a reform platform. Habibie saw that the only way for him to survive the day was to go along with these ideas, and the army was competing among themselves in order to do what? Not to protect the president, to help bring him down as well. It is like that film, Gladiator, how the palace guards went against the Caesar twice, the old Caesar and the new one.*

DEVLIN: I'm wondering if we could, if you don't mind—

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Excuse me, this seems to be an urgent call. [End of Tape1]*

—Wahid a minister from a television announcement. I had no idea.

DEVLIN: This was in what, this would have been right at the beginning of the Wahid administration that you were appointed—

KUSUMAATMADJA: *When he was announcing his cabinet, and he asked Mega to read out the list, and then to my surprise I heard my name being announced. At that time, I was offered a Ph.D. program in the U.S., and I was to pick and choose what subject I would like to pursue, and I was very interested in that. So I gave word to Mega and to Abdurrahman Wahid that I was not interested in a cabinet post. Then when that announcement was made, I thought to myself, if I refused that post, it would cause a very serious question about my intentions, because it was a reform government, Wahid was one of my close friends. It was like I was leaving him, so I said OK.*

I wasn't given a budget, I wasn't given an office, nothing. So I had to occupy an empty house belonging to my friend. So I just came into the house, picked up the phone and said, “OK, I'm using your empty house as a headquarters for my new

ministry.” The chap kept quiet on the line, said, “OK, I guess I have no other choice, go ahead.”

DEVLIN: So you came in as minister of Marine and Fisheries. You had a long career, a long-time identification as one of the most progressive elements in the Golkar Party, and you had come out prominently in the transition period. You're finally in what was hailed as the reform movement and you had a ministry. What were you going to do? What were your priorities?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Again, I was fortunate that I more or less knew what to do because I'd been groomed in marine affairs by my brother. My brother, Professor Mokhtar, was the chief negotiator in the United Nations Law on the Sea, which led to the adaptation of the archipelagic principle for Indonesia. Because of that principle we have vast marine territory. So I fit easily into that job. I knew what to do.

DEVLIN: Were there certain reforms that you believed needed to be in place or was it a matter of just getting the ministry functioning?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Mainly that, getting the ministry functioning and all that, formulating the mission statement, the mission program, all the necessary structural set up. Then after that is done and over with, I also learned from the television that I was fired. We were having a discussion at the time for a magazine and I got a call from a presidential spokesman. He said, “Pak Sarwono, this has nothing to do with me. I'm out of the room, I'm not there, I'm not party to the decision, but you have been just fired by the president.” “Oh yeah, thanks. Thanks for the information.” So we continued the discussion. Somebody from Tempo Magazine decided to switch on the television and sure, there I was, I saw my name being announced as a minister which was fired along with (Susilo) Bambang Yudhoyono.

DEVLIN: Why was that?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Because for various reasons. I think one reason was that I was against Abdurrahman Wahid, against his decree to abolish the Parliament, abolish the Constitution and all that.

DEVLIN: Now, when you mentioned moving into this empty house in the Ministry of Fisheries, it seemed in stark contrast to what you said about the Ministry of the Environment where you inherited this great staff from Emil Salim, his previous staff. That's kind of a question we come up against a lot, the idea of how do you build the staff you need to—.

KUSUMAATMADJA: Network. Because I was in the administration reform and I knew people because I was close to the civil service agency, and I was close to the training center. I know their rankings, I know their performance, both on the job and on training. I know who was doing what, I knew who knew what. So it was easy for me to set up the personnel. Just called them in and they were only too happy to work for me.

DEVLIN: So when you were calling these people in, what talents did you need most on your staff at the top level of the ministries, what capacities did you want the people around you to have?

KUSUMAATMADJA: What I was looking for are people who can make the job. You know, because we start from nothing. So they have to describe their own ideas and how to go about it, and what kind of laws and regulations they would like to see

and discuss it. So I had applications from various departments, people wanting to join me and they had to serve as volunteers for the first three months, because there was nothing that I could go and follow up with, because it was just an announcement in the television that I was appointed the minister. So I went to see Abdurrahman Wahid the next day and I said, "Do you have the presidential decision which stated that I was really appointed as your minister?" He said, "What presidential decisions? Those documents are legacy of the Suharto era. Now my word is enough, you are my minister." he said. So I had nothing: no budget, no nothing.

DEVLIN: So when you were appointed, surprisingly, minister of Marines and Fisheries, your connections into the training of the civil service—the training institute and that level were crucial, because you knew whom to go to to find the skills you wanted. Thinking back to the environment where the staff was already there, what skills were you most thankful that these people already possessed, that you had a team that could already do these tasks?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *They were not corrupt; they were idealistic. They were able, very able, knowledgeable, they worked hard, were loyal. So I think it depends. If you're one kind of a person, then you attract certain kinds of people to you; if you're another kind, then another flock of birds would be congregating around you just like that.*

DEVLIN: One question ministers usually have in terms of staffing is you have this thing do you want the technical abilities specific to your ministry, do you want one environmentalist, or there is another side obviously to governance: do you want legalists, people who think in terms of the laws and the regulations that you can put up. What was the balance there, or was there even a different element when you were thinking about the team you wanted around you?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Well, if the law is good, I'll follow the law. If law is bad, then I'll do things in order to force people to change the law. I'll give you an example. Once I was in dire need of navigational maps in order to assess the damage done by forest fires on the ground, because the satellite surveillance data was already there, but a ground truthing was something different. We had to have these navigational maps. Then when I tried to get these maps, I found out that you can only get these maps through the permit issued by the intelligence agency of the armed forces. I knew that was a silly rule. I knew that I had to have that law changed. So you know what I did? I stole the maps from the mapping agency at 3:00 in the morning. For good measure, I had soldiers included in my raiding delegation. So they were equipped with an extra set of keys and crowbars and took out the maps from the agency's vaults.*

Then the next day at 8:00 in the morning, my people presented themselves at the cashiers of that agency to pay for the maps. At 10:00, the head of that mapping agency got wise that his vault was raided and set an emergency meeting and sent an angry invitation for my agency to account for the loss of those maps. So my delegation said, "What? We stole the maps? What maps? We paid already this morning at eight." "But you broke into my map room," they said. "Who broke into your map room? Why don't you call your security officer?" Then security officers came. Of course he didn't dare say that we broke into his map room because my raiding party included soldiers from Kopassus and marines. Who was he to accuse the marines and the special forces of breaking in? Of course he didn't dare. He said, "There's no such raid, sir."

So at 12:00 I came to his office, said it's time you petition the government to legislate maps as belonging to the public domain; maps are open information. Of course we didn't manage to do that, but we managed to extract a statement, written statement, from the armed forces intelligence agency in which he disclaims any regulations on the confidentiality of navigational maps. From that time on, everybody was able to access those maps.

DEVLIN: Now one thing that you had mentioned—.

KUSUMAATMADJA: I had my way of dealing with shirkers as well. My colleague was a shirker because he was a senior minister and he was about to retire, and he just didn't want to work. See? His job at that time was to distribute emergency aid to the regions. Instead of him working at it, he asked my office to do that. Of course I refused. So what we went and did was to design a distribution center in his office, had all the tables ordered. We had a mock room, based it in my office, and at 11:00 in the evening, we moved the whole thing to his working room. When he came to the office at 8:00 in the morning, he couldn't do anything else but to officiate the distribution center, because there was press present. For good measure, just to make sure that he didn't make any hue and cry about it, I put a very huge sign, UNDP (United Nations Development Program), and put a westerner there, a Frenchman, just to pose as a U.N. officer.

When the minister saw the logo, he must have assumed that there was international intervention involved so he didn't care to make a fuss about it.

DEVLIN: The Frenchman wasn't even a United Nations—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: No. I told him, "OK, if the minister asks you in English, you answer in French because if you answer in English you'll be forced to lie. I don't want you to lie." That poor Frenchman was forced to agree to play that role because he was standing in line to get a contract project from my office. So if you're chaotic the government, you join the chaos to make things work. He really enjoyed his part distributing emergency aid to the regions and being on TV.

DEVLIN: One thing that had come up before is this idea of how you retain staff. Sometimes you'll get very highly qualified, well-trained people under you, but you can lose them. You can lose them to other competing agencies or you can even lose them to the private sector. Historically, that may not have been such a challenge with Indonesia because the state was the main employer, but over time it shifted.

KUSUMAATMADJA: Strange thing is it never happened to me. People loved working with me. I know from my story to you, it is clear that my methods are not sustainable. It works while I am there, but then once I'm gone, the whole bureaucratic culture will spring back.

DEVLIN: So that question of sustainability? What can one do?

KUSUMAATMADJA: I think the general direction of democracy, transparency will have to take hold, meritocracy. It's a process, it's a long process.

DEVLIN: Now a lot of the people we talk to at the ministerial level say it can be hard to change the attitude, the mindset of the civil servants who work with them. Is that something that you've attempted to—?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Maybe this is something good about the fact that a lot of the authority is now given over to the local government. Now people compete for best performance, and you can actually see with your own eyes how region after region shape up because of this competition. Competition to attract investments, competition to attract central government budget, competition in order for that chap to be held in high regard and to retain his office during the second election. People are starting to realize that if you make a fool of yourself while in office, you and your family will suffer after you've left office, because of disgrace and all that. People are learning. So it is the system that shapes behavior.

Now, during the new order, the whole system was closely-knit, involuted and self-serving. So any attempt for reform would be unsustainable, given the macro-environment.

DEVLIN: One thing that has come up a few times in our conversation is the idea of patronage, patronage politics. A lot of people say that that is a challenge that really characterized Indonesia's politics for a long time. But it is a challenge that exists everywhere. Sometimes, there are just people that have to be accommodated for some reason. So I guess the challenge is that when you're in that system where patronage predominates and it is expected, is there a way you can include those people who need to be included for expediency, but also isolate them?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Oh yes.

DEVLIN: How do you do that?

KUSUMAATMADJA: Give them a sinecure, a high-sounding office which sounds good, but which keeps a person busy and which is essentially meaningless. I'd like to give you a very interesting story about patronage. When I was the secretary-general of Golkar, my wife was sick and she had to be hospitalized in the Netherlands for six months. I and my friends, we went on a collection binge to finance that, the medical expenses that were incurred. I had more than enough money to cover the expenses, so I thought I didn't need any other resources. Suddenly the general chairman of Golkar called me into his office. He said, "Sarwono, how's your wife?" "Thank you sir, she is recovering. He also gave me some money to help me out. "The president has been asking, and he was hurt that you didn't even bother to ask for his help." I said, "Why should I, because I have so much help from my friends already. So if I ask the president for help, it is like trying to make a profit of my wife's afflictions, and it is morally not right."

"Yeah, I know how you think about these things, but at least you can write him a letter to thank him for his concern." "But I don't want his money." He said, "You don't have to ask for money, just ask for his guidance". So I dutifully wrote a letter to the president; "Thank you for your concern, Sir, but my wife she is recovering and all that. Thank you for your guidance". Three days later, his cashier phoned me and said, "Pak Sarwono, the president has instructed me to give you the guidance that you need". Of course I said, "What guidance?" He brought me cash: US\$5,000. Then the cashier also asked me whether I wanted to bring my kids there, whether I needed the services of a personal doctor. "You name it, the president is ready to oblige."

I said, "No, no, no, this is more than enough." Five thousand dollars, for what? Then I had the rules about these presidential grants for medical treatment. The rules say that any expenses incurred should be reported and the remaining of the

funds should be returned to the state coffers. So this \$5,000, I'm scratching my head. So I collected my hotel bills, my medical bills, it came up to \$2,000. So the \$2,000 I reported to the president, the \$3,000 I returned to the state coffers. You know what the president had to say? (I heard later on that he was not pleased about my returning the rest of the money to the government.)

The president's office, I know, they kept reminding a certain minister to return money because he was not returning the money. But when you return the money, then the president complains. So, how should we behave?

DEVLIN: So in that culture of patronage, like you were saying, one way of dealing with that is that you can give people sinecures. This party needs to be accommodated, OK, we'll put your person in this position with this great name and business card. But sometimes I imagine the name itself won't do, this person wants influence or wants to be made to feel as though they have influence. How do you negotiate that?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *It may be strange, but there are very few people who can make his job. So people sometimes don't realize that they're being fooled. Some people think that they're really there to play the role. There are too many people like that. You come across very few people who have this strategic mindset in the sense that the person would know that they're being put aside, kicked upstairs. It goes with the feudal mentality that is prevalent in the bureaucracy. Conversely, you can be put into a very strategic position which is not obviously so, because you enjoy very few perks, and people don't realize that you are there to do a lot of things that might change. So the way that Sri Mulyani works is before she puts somebody in a position of meaning, that person would be shunted off in an expert staff position; that's where his game plan is being cooked up there, out of sight of everybody. Then after that, she says, "You go there."*

DEVLIN: So that's a tactic that Sri Mulyani uses?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Yes, she's a very good minister.*

DEVLIN: Now, when you have responsibility for portfolios like the one you've had, you can be in a position where you're putting people in charge where they will effectively have their own source of patronage; they'll be in positions where they can then control other positions. So you're effectively ceding control over that part of the ministry. You sometimes get this, we see in other cases this cascading effect. A patronage appointee can be put in a position, and then every position underneath that in the pyramid is suddenly corrupted. How have you approached it?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *I approached it early in the game.*

DEVLIN: Put him in and then kick him out?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Kick him out, yes. I did that in the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries. I put somebody as a DG and then he started monkeying around. I said, I told him to his face. I'll tell the president that you need to be fired. If he refuses to fire you, I'll resign from the cabinet. Finished. And everybody else will be scared. Suharto told me how to keep the bureaucracy in line. When I became the minister of administrative reform, I asked him, "Mr. President, I need advice because I'm new as a minister. How would you keep the bureaucracy in line, because they seem to be living in their own world? They may say "yes, Minister"*

but they do things behind my back which I don't really know about. So how do you keep them in line?"

He said, "You have to first fire somebody within this six months, not later." "Who," I said. "Take your pick. If you can't find his mistakes, find one." "Will you support me, Sir?" "I always support whatever my minister decides for his office." So I did. I fired the most influential of them all, only for the reason that he was bragging to his friends that I as a new minister would not dare act against him because he used to be the presidential aide-de-camp. He was a navy man, a two-star general.

So the next week I came again to Suharto, and I said, "Sir, I have a candidate to be fired." "Who?" he said. "This fellow." "Oh, he used to be my ADC." "Yes." "He's not suitable for you, fire him." So I told him, "I have no further need for you. I have agreement from the president that a new secretary would be in place next week." He was aghast; he didn't know what was coming. Him? A former ADC of the president fired? No way. He was fired.

DEVLIN: Do we have to close up?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *Yes, I have a meeting in the Parliament building. [interruption]*

DEVLIN: In that case, maybe we can close with one final thing I was curious about getting your opinion on. That is brokerage. What we find some people call brokerage, the idea that inside civil service, in ministries and agencies, positions are bought and sold. There is this informal marketization of positions. Is that something that either you've had to deal with or you're familiar with in Indonesia?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *No, because people would know that I don't deal with those things, so people would shy away.*

DEVLIN: I'm wondering if you've had to fight that in ministries that you've been—.

KUSUMAATMADJA: *No.*

DEVLIN: Then in all the stuff we've talked about, the different reforms you've been involved in, you often have to have an idea of what needs to be done, and we find that people usually don't have the time to basically get that information, get those ideas. Where did you turn to for your information for your ideas in the stuff you wanted to do?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *I consult seniors, the people I respect, and I learn from the literature. That's about it. The rest is just gut feeling and intuition.*

DEVLIN: A final question, I promise. Several people we talk to have stressed that when it comes to reform, it's important to have a leader who can provide a narrative, who can tell a story around which reform can gather. In your experience, how important is that to have this story of reform, this leader who can kind of give things shape?

KUSUMAATMADJA: *I think communications is one of the keys to success in getting people to be motivated and to perform and to present their best. So again, you have to be present all the time. To give an example, it's a habit of other ministers to delegate presence to officers whenever there is a gathering of junior officers. I don't*

delegate, I always came myself and that is appreciated and remembered. It's a great motivation for them.

DEVLIN: Well, thank you again for taking the time. There are a hundred other questions I could ask, hopefully we'll get another chance at some point, but thanks so much for taking the time to talk to us today.

KUSUMAATMADJA: OK.