

IN BRIEF: POLITICAL

Only fools rush in

A wise man once said that anyone who is capable of getting themselves made president should not be allowed to do the job. In Indonesia, the ability to become president, at least in the early stages of a campaign, is decided by the skill with which deals can be made with other political elites.

In the last few weeks, Jakarta's politicians have been feeling each other out for partnerships that could maximize their chances of attaining political power. And, according to *Report* sources, the possible permutations are dizzying.

It looks increasingly unlikely that the current Yudhoyono-Kalla team will contest the 2009 elections and the two politicians have been considering their options.

According to a source from the Golkar Party's inner circle, Jusuf Kalla's "success team" has been mulling over a running mate, should he decide to go for the top job. As previously reported, Kalla's camp thinks that the Sulawesi-born businessman would need either a Javanese or military figure as a vice-presidential candidate to cover all the electoral bases. At the moment, the strongest candidates are former Jakarta governor Gen. (ret) Sutiyoso, Yogyakarta Governor Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X, and former Army chief Gen. (ret) Ryamizard Ryacudu.

Sources say that Ryacudu remains ambivalent about the prospect, unlike Hamengkubuwono, who is keener to be Kalla's second fiddle. Ryacudu is not considered to be a political player but was approached by Kalla after he was replaced as army chief by Yudhoyono.

In contrast, Sutiyoso is said to be "considering" Kalla's offer, with those close to him saying he would actually prefer the presidential nomination. However, given that Sutiyoso has not yet managed to gain the support of any major party, his options are currently limited.

"[Sutiyoso] said he would team up with Kalla if Golkar allowed him to become the party's next chairman. But Surya Palloh also wants to head Golkar and he was very upset about hearing Sutiyoso's suggestion," a source claimed.

Meanwhile, Yudhoyono's camp has also been busy coming up with a list of possible vice-presidents. "There could be a separation between [Yudhoyono] and Kalla in the next elections," a senior Democrat Party executive confirmed. "But we have plenty of names in our pocket as replacements," he said.

Yudhoyono is said to be keen to keep the winning formula of a Golkar running mate in order to ensure support from the House of Representatives (DPR) should he win. This is because pundits still expect Golkar to win the lion's share of DPR seats in the 2009 legislative elections. Some names suggested include former House speaker Akbar Tandjung, current Speaker Agung Laksono and senior Golkar executive Muladi.

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The latest opinion poll from the Indonesian Survey Institute puts Yudhoyono at 35.5 percent and Megawati at 28 percent if there was an election today. While these two are still the candidates to beat, a serious search is also on for a “new” face. The only problem is that the alternatives currently being touted are in fact mostly old faces.

Former armed forces chief, Gen. (ret) Wiranto, is one such possibility. But sources say that Wiranto would only put himself forward on a nomination from Hanura, the party he set up in December 2006. It will be a tall order to expect a new party to win the seven percent of legislative election votes that would be needed to field a presidential candidate. However, Wiranto’s political team has been very busy establishing the party, and it now has more than 400 regional offices across Indonesia.

Wiranto’s biggest problem is his alleged involvement in human rights abuses, particularly in Indonesia’s former province of East Timor.

Other possible figures include former Kopassus commander, Prabowo Subiyanto, who one of our sources claims has more military support than Wiranto. However, Prabowo is also dogged by allegations of human rights abuses on a scale even worse than Wiranto’s.

The third most-talked-about figure and arguably the freshest face of the bunch is Rizal Ramli, who formerly served as coordinating economics minister under president Abdurrahman Wahid. Ramli made the headlines in November when he set up a group called the *Komite Bangkit Indonesia* (Indonesian Awakening Committee), which involved senior politicians from a range of political parties.

However, *Report* sources say that Ramli has little chance of securing a presidential nomination, despite his claims that Wahid’s National Awakening Party (PKB) will support him. “His only hope [to become a presidential candidate] is if the Constitution is changed to allow independent candidates,” one source said. “But a deal has already been done between the executive and the legislature to bury that issue until after the 2009 elections.”

There is little excitement within the political establishment about any of these “alternative” options. The net is still being cast for a completely fresh figure, who has the requisite political weight, but not the baggage of some contenders. But if such a person exists, there are still some restrictions that cannot be negotiated.

“No matter who the new figure is, there are two conditions that cannot be traded: the figure must either represent an Islamic group or be endorsed by the army,” one *Report* source said.

The more things change, the more they stay the same.