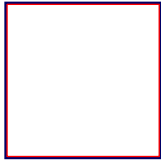


June 12, 1999

## Like Father, Like Daughter in Indonesia, or So Sukarno's Faded Loyalists Hope



By MARK LANDLER

**J**AKARTA, Indonesia -- To enter Supeni's sun-dappled home here is to be transported to a different time -- a newsreel era in which Indonesia was young and a brash soldier named Sukarno ruled.

Portraits of Sukarno, Indonesia's founding president, peer down from two walls of Mrs. Supeni's living room -- one smiling, one stern -- like relics in a musty shrine. Sipping tea under his gaze and reminiscing about his tempestuous rule, Mrs. Supeni, 81, is the very embodiment of a Sukarno loyalist.

"We adored him because he was a fighter," said Mrs. Supeni, who like many Indonesians uses only one name. "From the very first day, I called him Brother Sukarno. He was a friend of the people."

This week the ghost of Sukarno has hung heavily over this sprawling country of more than 200 million, as it held its first democratic elections in 44 years.

The party of Sukarno's 52-year-old daughter, Megawati Sukarnoputri, seems headed for victory in the parliamentary vote -- raising the possibility that another Sukarno may become the nation's next leader.

For older Indonesians like Mrs.

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Supeni, who have burned a candle for Sukarno since he fell from power in 1966 and died in 1970, the prospect that his daughter may inherit his power is at once exhilarating and sobering.

"God willing, Megawati will win," said Mrs. Supeni, a regal woman who first met Sukarno in 1931 and served as deputy foreign minister in his government in the 1960s. "Indonesia needs someone like her at this moment."

On the other hand, Mrs. Supeni said Mrs. Megawati, a gentle, placid-looking housewife who was drafted into politics six years ago largely because of her name, is hardly a replica of her charismatic father.

"Many people think that because she is a Sukarno, they will be getting Sukarno," Mrs. Supeni said. "She is a Sukarno biologically but not ideologically. I think people may be disappointed."

Not least Mrs. Supeni herself. She is the leader of Sukarno's original party, the Indonesian Nationalist Party, which fielded its own candidates for Parliament and has not been invited to join a potential coalition with Mrs. Megawati's Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle. Less a political force than a historical curiosity, Mrs. Supeni's party has drawn a fraction of the votes of the Democratic Party.

True believers like Mrs. Supeni are a tiny and dwindling bunch, consisting of retired civil servants and military officers who stayed loyal to Sukarno after he was maneuvered out of power by President Suharto. For the last 32 years, a group of them gathered weekly in Mrs. Supeni's living room to talk politics and vent their anger at the repressive Suharto government.

While the older generation talked, their grandchildren marched in democracy rallies that convulsed Jakarta and other Indonesian cities last year and helped force Suharto to resign.

In the early days of Suharto's rule, Mrs. Supeni said, she was harassed by the police regularly. She said she eluded prison only because Suharto's wife once publicly greeted her at a reception -- sending a message that her husband had decided to tolerate her low-key dissent.

"People used to come into my house and say, 'Why do you keep these pictures up?'" she said. "I would reply, 'Why not?'"

Suharto's relatively benign treatment of Mrs. Supeni underscores how he grappled with his predecessor's legacy. He pilloried Sukarno for his economic policy, which by the mid-1960s had plunged Indonesia into an economic crisis as dire as today's.

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But Suharto also understood that many Indonesians regarded Sukarno as a hero. He was the warrior who drove the Dutch out of Indonesia, the builder who fashioned a nation out of a far-flung archipelago. And with his jet-black hair and slick sunglasses, he cut a deeply romantic figure.

"He is appealing, above all, because he is seen as the reverse of Suharto," said Herb Feith, a lecturer at Gadjah Mada University in Jogjakarta. "Sukarno was honest, Suharto is corrupt. Sukarno was exciting, Suharto is boring. Sukarno died relatively poor, Suharto is notoriously rich."

The truth, of course, is more complicated. In his later years, Sukarno became isolated and repressive. His economic policy, which consisted largely of spurning aid from the West, left Indonesia in a shambles.

But as the Suharto government became deeply unpopular, Sukarno's failings did not seem to matter. During the 1987 elections, thousands of young people wore Sukarno T-shirts to political rallies. The cult of Sukarno grew so rapidly that the authorities banned the T-shirts in the 1992 election.

When the Suharto government fell last year, Sukarno re-emerged. During this year's campaign, posters and T-shirts for the Democratic Party featured his face looming just behind his daughter's. Mrs. Megawati did not hesitate to capitalize on her father's celebrity while campaigning. She has told advisers that she communes with his spirit for advice.

"She always says that her teacher in politics was her father," said Dimiyati Hartono, a legal adviser to Mrs. Megawati and a professor at the University of Indonesia who keeps Sukarno memorabilia in his office.

Adam Schwarz, the author of "A Nation in Waiting" (1994), a political history of modern Indonesia, said, "Megawati seen as a unifier, a nation-builder, someone who gives Indonesians a sense of nationhood."

That, of course, is exactly what Sukarno was remembered for. And that is the main reason that Mrs. Supeni -- despite her reservations about Mrs. Megawati's style -- cannot help supporting the daughter of her idol.

"I am loyal to all Sukarno's children," she said. "If there is a chance for them to make something out of themselves, then why not?"

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