

# A WORLD IN MOTION



ISSUE 165 | 16 FEBRUARY 2017

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*The bitter feuding over the powerful post of Jakarta governor has elevated Indonesia's local elections to ones of national significance.*

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## THE NUMBERS: INDONESIAN ELECTIONS



101

The number of regions holding city, provincial and district elections across Indonesia



7.2 million

The number of registered voters in the greater Jakarta area



4

The number of anti-Ahok, mass protest rallies since October 2016



5 years

The maximum prison sentence for blasphemy in Indonesia

## INDONESIA—A VOTE THAT COULD CHANGE A NATION



By Donnelly McClelland

Tens of millions of Indonesians headed to the polls on Wednesday (15 February) in local elections across the Muslim-majority country, with bitter feuding over the powerful post of Jakarta governor stoking political and religious tensions. Incumbent Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, Jakarta's first ethnic Chinese and Christian leader in over fifty years, has angered some Muslim voters for allegedly insulting the Quran. He has denied wrongdoing, but is on trial for blasphemy in a case that rights groups and his supporters view as politically motivated. Mr Basuki is backed by President Joko Widodo's party and is running against two Muslim candidates [who] appear to have won over much of the conservative Islamic vote and some Basuki supporters. "In terms of performance, I support Ahok," said Ferdi Ramadhan (20) referring to Basuki's nickname. "However, there's the consideration of religion. I'm a Muslim...so I think I will vote for Anies Baswedan," he said.

Despite the blasphemy allegations, Mr Basuki has rebounded in opinion polls to remain a frontrunner. Even if he is convicted, he is legally allowed to run the city as long as appeals are under way, according to analysts. Jakarta's poll is one of scores of regional elections held in other provinces, cities, and districts throughout Indonesia. But nowhere are the stakes quite as high as in Jakarta. Winning Jakarta can be a stepping stone to the presidency and Wednesday's vote is widely being seen as a proxy ahead of the 2019 presidential elections. *(Reuters)*

### The vote that could change a nation

Indonesia is paused on a knife edge, with a regional vote carrying national consequences. After decades

of authoritarian rule, Indonesia has come to be seen as a relatively stable, tolerant democracy. Many Western nations have long held it up as a model for religious pluralism and democracy in the region. But these elections have exposed potentially deadly fault lines within this pluralist society. Just 9% of the population are Christian, but they are the majority in some eastern islands. And on the tourist hub of Bali, the majority religion is Hindu. Jakarta, the capital, is where the different cultures mostly meet and live side by side.

For the protestors calling for Mr Basuki to be jailed, their reasoning is clear: they don't accept him as a senior leader because he is Christian. "In a Muslim country, leaders should be Muslims," says protestor Sisi Marissa Toer.

About three decades ago, Haji Muhammad Suharto, Indonesia's second president, signed a decree banning provocative political discourse on ethnicity, race and religion in an effort to maintain public order, and racial and religious harmony. But the practice of avoiding these sensitive topics seems to have been broken in these contentious local elections. "The manipulation of race and religion, such as the blasphemy charge against Ahok, in a political campaign to crush an opponent, breaks the long-held taboo against using these issues brazenly to gain political advantage," said Douglas Ramage, a political analyst based in Jakarta.

"Some people are saying, 'Chinese dominate the economic sphere in Indonesia. Now you want to dominate politics?' It creates fear," added Ms Wahid, the daughter of former President Abdurrahman Wahid, a revered Islamic cleric who fought for religious pluralism in Indonesia.

Mr Basuki holds the unenviable position of being a double minority, a Christian and Chinese. Islamist groups, including organisations that have long demanded that the secular government be replaced by an Islamic state, have continually protested Mr Basuki's tenure. They have appealed to Muslim residents not to vote for him. If he wins, he would be the first ethnic Chinese Christian directly elected to the office.

# NEWS HEADLINES



Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, a **Pakistani** Taliban-linked armed group, claimed responsibility for a powerful bomb blast which ripped through a protest rally in the Pakistani city of Lahore, killing at least 14 people and wounding dozens more. The explosion went off in Lahore's busy Mall Road during a rally attended by hundreds of pharmacists protesting against changes to a drug sale law outside the provincial assembly building.



Michael Flynn has resigned as **US** national security adviser over his contact with Russian officials before President Donald Trump took office. His resignation followed reports a day earlier that the Department of Justice warned the Trump administration weeks ago, that such communications could leave him in a compromised position. It is illegal for private citizens to conduct US diplomacy.



**North Korea** defended its latest ballistic missile launch and slammed UN Security Council condemnation in a defiant statement, as tensions escalate over the reclusive state's recent behaviour. The communique from the North's foreign ministry came as investigators in Malaysia probe the shock assassination of Kim Jong-Un's half brother on Monday (13 February) at Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

## Far-reaching consequences

Before the blasphemy case, Mr Basuki was predicted to win the election by a landslide, but now – running against two Muslim candidates – he is fighting for his political career. Since taking over as Jakarta's governor, Mr Basuki has earned a reputation as an effective, no-nonsense leader through his dogged pursuit of anti-corruption and urban renewal measures. He has been widely praised for rolling out healthcare and education policies for the poor. But his abrasive language and insistence on clearing the city's slums has alienated many voters.

Protests against him in November and December, organised by hard-line Islamic groups, drew hundreds of thousands to Jakarta's streets and shook the centrist-minded government of President Widodo, a long-time ally of Mr Basuki. If the turmoil in Jakarta continues, it could undermine Indonesia's political coherence and threaten the president's vision to use the country's strategic maritime position to increase its influence in the region.

Mr Basuki, if found guilty of blasphemy, faces up to five years in prison. Most blasphemy cases in Indonesia in recent years have ended in conviction.

**PRAY > For Mr Basuki to have wisdom and grace as he responds to his accusers > For Mr Basuki's life to be a testimony of the Lord's grace > For Indonesian believers to be bold but gentle in their witness to their Muslim neighbours**

## FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Mr Basuki's team privately admits he made a political mistake. He himself has repeatedly apologised and insists he would not insult Islam, the religion of his extended family (his adoptive parents are Muslim). But the implications of his off-the-cuff remark are now immense. His lawyer, Sirra Prajuna, sums up the magnitude of Mr Basuki's trial: "This is a test for tolerance and our multi-faith society. Indonesia is a pluralist nation that has great respect for different faiths. We cannot let this case sink the dream of our founding fathers who wrote our national motto: 'Bhinneka Tunggal Ika' (which means 'Unity in Diversity')".

Mr Basuki's sister, Fifi Leity Indra, says her brother is holding up well in the midst of his trial. "He understands that he may receive persecution because of what he believes. He also believes that God is going to use this as a showcase to make people have more strong belief that in everything God is in control."

The Lord can turn this apparently hopeless situation around. He can use a 'weak vessel', like Mr Basuki (a double-minority citizen) to shame the 'strong' (1 Corinthians 1:27), and He can use him to bring about reconciliation in a deeply divided society and halt the slide towards Islamic extremism.

## UPDATE ON US TRAVEL BAN SAGA



By *Cherolyn Amery*

**W**ashington state's attorney general has promised to uncover "what truly motivated" President Donald Trump's executive order on immigration, an approach that could prompt a rare public examination of how a US president makes national security decisions. The presidential order imposed a temporary ban on travellers from seven predominantly Muslim countries, but a federal judge has barred enforcement of the order while the court considers a challenge brought by Washington state. The Trump administration has argued that the ban is necessary to prevent potential terrorists from entering the country and is not discriminatory because the text of the order does not mention any particular religion. Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson signalled that he will move aggressively to obtain written documents and emails authored by administration officials that might contain evidence the order was unconstitutionally biased against Muslims or Islam. (*Reuters*)

### Complicated US situation

At present, little is known about what the next steps in the 'travel ban' saga will be – protestors, legal professionals and the Trump administration are considering their options moving forward. The appeals court that suspended the ban quoted a 75-year-old Supreme Court precedent about a legal obligation "in time of war as well as in time of peace, to preserve unimpaired the constitutional safeguards of civil liberty". Opponents of the ban are referring to 1965 law prohibiting any discrimination against immigrants according to country of origin. Meanwhile, the Trump administration is arguing that the president "has authority under the Constitution and congressional statute to control immigration for national security purposes", citing a 1952 law that enables the president to block immigrants if they are deemed "detrimental to the interests of the United States" (*USA Today*).

Many are pointing to Mr Trump's statements about his intention to "ban Muslims" – made during his presidential campaign – as proof of his prejudice. But according to Michael McConnell, a professor at Stanford University Law School and a former federal appeals judge, campaign statements should not be considered in court, because they were made before the president swore an oath to uphold the Constitution.

### Muslim world response

Of the seven countries included in the travel ban – Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen – only Iraq and Iran have been vocal in their protestations.

The Iraqi government said that the security motives behind the ban were understandable, but they would

## NEWS HEADLINES



**US** President Donald Trump met **Israeli** Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu face-to-face for the first time since Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential election. He urged the Israelis to curb settlement activity but avoided any explicit endorsement of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a longstanding bedrock of US Middle East policy.



A former prime minister who holds dual Somali-US citizenship has been declared **Somalia's** new president. Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo was named the new leader after two rounds of voting on Wednesday 8 February, and quickly took the oath of office. Incumbent President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud conceded defeat.



A **Kenyan** court ruled that the government must not close the world's largest refugee camp and send more than 200,000 people back to war-torn Somalia, a decision that eases pressure on Somalis who feared the camp would close by the end of May.

Kenya's internal security minister abused his power by ordering the closure of Dadaab camp, Judge John Mativo said, [they] "acted in excess and in abuse of their power, in violation of the rule of law and in contravention of their oaths of office."

like the "special relationship" between Iraq and the US to be considered. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has been widely criticised by an angry public for not taking a stronger stance against the US and for not implementing the Parliament's call for reduced military co-operation, a limit on or prevention of US military presence in the country after the Islamic State is defeated, and a counter travel ban. Shiite Muslim militias in Iraq (supported by the Shia-majority Iran) have warned that they will target US interests if the US 'goes too far' against Iran. In the Iraqi military, there is anger about being grouped (under the ban) with the extremists that they have been fighting.

In Iran, foreign minister Javad Zarif tweeted that the ban was "a great gift to extremists" and that the "collective discrimination aids terrorist recruitment by deepening faultlines". The Iranian government warned of reciprocal measures against US passport holders, and said that the ban was insulting to the Muslim world (something of great significance, as 'honour' and 'shame' are critical in the Muslim world). In a speech in Tehran, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei spoke of being grateful to Mr Trump for revealing "the real face of America" and of the "political, economic, moral and social corruption in the ruling system of the US".

David Patrikarakos, writing for *Politico*, says that the fracturing relationship with the US could put 'moderate' Iranian president Hassan Rouhani in a weakened position going into the May presidential elections, as the ban has "given fuel" to his hardliner opponents. Opposition to the US is a central part of hardline ideology in Iran, and without the US as an enemy, hardliners' "legitimacy" decreases. If Mr Trump's ban is upheld, it once again creates an enemy of the US, which could lead to greater conservatism being implemented in the country.

**PRAY > For the US to strive for balance between compassion and security > For there to be no negative backlash towards US missionaries/humanitarian workers in Muslim nations > For US believers to continue to work towards 'building bridges' across cultural, ethnic and religious divides**

## ANTI-CORRUPTION PROTESTS IN IRAQ TURN VIOLENT



By **Donnelly McClelland**

**A** huge anti-corruption protest in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, turned violent on Saturday (11 February). Demonstrators demanding electoral reform tried to force their way into Baghdad's heavily-fortified 'Green Zone', which houses government offices and embassies. As well as tear gas, rubber bullets were reportedly fired by security forces in clashes that left at least seven people dead, according to police. Dozens more are reported injured. Some Iraqi media accounts say hundreds of people were hurt. "We demand a change of government," said one protester, Ali al-Saddi. "We

In an article for *Voice of America*, Masood Farivar noted that while many throughout the Middle East were critical of the ban on social media and television, the Saudi Arabian, Egyptian and UAE governments (all US allies) were significantly silent. Cairo-based Al-Azhar, the centre of religious scholarship "that often takes public positions on issues of concern to Muslims around the world", also held back from commenting on the issue. Farivar attributes these decisions to "vested interest in boosting ties with the US" (Egypt wants Mr Trump to declare the Muslim Brotherhood to be a terrorist organisation, and Saudi Arabia wants the US to take a tougher stance against Iran).

### FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The Christian response to the travel ban has been mixed. Some believe that ensuring the security of the nation is of utmost importance. Others disagree, pointing to teachings in the Bible – like "love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12:31) and "you are to love those who are foreigners" (Deuteronomy 10:19) – and saying that the ban violates Christian principles. A group of evangelical leaders have written a letter to Mr Trump, asking him to reconsider the ban and stating their belief that the US "can continue to be both compassionate and secure".

According to *The Guardian*, most of the major refugee resettlement organisations who work with the federal government are linked to faith groups, and for the "many Christian organisations working at the frontlines of the refugee crisis", the order for the ban was a "devastating blow".

Meanwhile, Archbishop Raphael Sako of the Chaldean Church in Iraq said that Mr Trump's intention to give Christian refugees special provision within the ban could ultimately be harmful – it could "feed into extremist ideologies that view Christians in the Middle East as 'foreign bodies', and as groups protected and supported by Western powers" (*Al Jazeera*).

want patriotic people to replace them and start rebuilding Iraq. The elections were manipulated and a sham. Every four years we have the same people. We want honest people." The protesters, mainly supporters of prominent Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, want a commission supervising elections to be overhauled ahead of a provincial vote in September. (*Euronews*)

### Iraq's legacy of corruption

Corruption in Iraq is a major problem, and has been connected to chronically weak accounting and inadequate governance. Estimates of amounts that have gone missing vary from \$100 billion lost since 2003 to \$20 billion in 2013 alone. One Iraqi government official has estimated that the amount lost to corruption is as high as \$300 billion.

Studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between inequality and corruption, which tend to feed off one another. The interaction of corruption and inequality has also been shown to breed populism (political action targeting large groups of the

## FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

### INcontext Website:

[www.incontextministries.org](http://www.incontextministries.org)

Please visit our website for up-to-date information on events around the world.

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population who feel alienated by elitist leadership). When conventional politicians fail to tackle corruption, people grow cynical and increasingly turn to populist leaders who promise to break the cycle of corruption and privilege. However, history demonstrates that populism more often exacerbates – rather than resolves – the tensions that feed the populist movement in the first place.

### **The Corruption Perceptions Index 2016**

*Transparency International* (a global coalition against corruption) recently released its report, 'The Corruption Perceptions Index 2016', rating 176 nations and territories. Their results are disturbing: "Over two-thirds of countries and territories in this year's index fall below the midpoint of our scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). The global average score is a paltry 43, indicating endemic corruption in a country's public sector. Top-scoring countries are far outnumbered by countries where citizens face the tangible impact of corruption on a daily basis."

The top five (least corrupt) countries were found to be Denmark, New Zealand, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland; while the bottom seven (most corrupt) included the following: Libya, Sudan, Yemen, Syria, North Korea, South Sudan and Somalia. Iraq is ranked 166 out of the 176 countries assessed.

The report concludes that countries ranked high on the list exhibit "higher degrees of press freedom, access to information about public expenditure, stronger standards of integrity for public officials, and independent judicial systems", whereas those ranked lower "are plagued by untrustworthy and badly functioning public institutions like the police and judiciary".

The report was particularly telling with regards to Arab nations, where there has been a dramatic decline despite the sense of hope many felt after the 'Arab Spring' uprisings six years ago. 90 percent of Arab nations scored below 50, which is a failing grade. Five out of the ten most corrupt countries in the world are also afflicted with political instability, war, internal conflicts and terrorism, "stressing the fact that war and conflict fuel corruption and in particular political corruption".

The five countries that serve as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council represent

varying degrees of corruption, with Britain (81) among the least corrupt, followed by the United States (74) and France (69), while China (40) and Russia (29) scored as more corrupt.

### **FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

"In too many countries, people are deprived of their most basic needs and go to bed hungry every night because of corruption, while the powerful and corrupt enjoy lavish lifestyles with impunity," Jose Ugaz (chairman of *Transparency International*) said.

Proverbs 29:2 says, "When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan." People seem to be groaning in various places across the world, including Romania (with the ongoing mass demonstrations) and Iraq (with the recent protests). People from vastly different ethnic and religious backgrounds are expressing an equal longing for righteousness.

Approximately 95 percent of the top 20 least corrupt nations, according to the *Corruption Perceptions Index 2016*, are 'Western' nations, many of which have strong Christian foundations (though characterised as secular in today's terms) especially when it comes to the aspect of 'rule of law' and individual liberties.

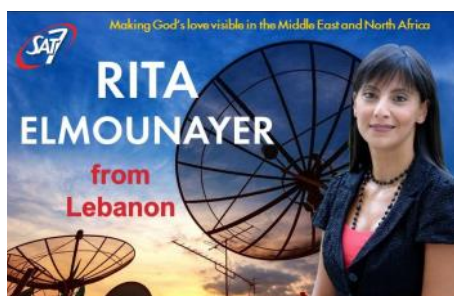
Augusto Zimmermann (an internationally known legal scholar and a vice-president of the Australian Society of Legal Philosophy) states: "According to the tradition of the rule of law in the West, to be under law presupposes the existence of certain laws serving as an effective check on arbitrary power. The rule of law is therefore far more than the mere existence of positive laws, as it also requires the state to act in accordance with principles of a 'higher law'". He goes on to assert: "The modern roots of our individual rights and freedoms in the Western world are found in Christianity."

Paul L. Maier, professor of Ancient History at Western Michigan University, states: "No other religion, philosophy, teaching, nation, movement—whatever—has so changed the world for the better as Christianity has done."

But Mr Zimmermann goes on to caution that the rise of moral relativism, with its gradual abandonment of the Christian faith and culture in the Western world, is beginning to erode the moral foundations for the rule of law.

**PRAY > For governments to hear and respond to their citizens' cry for righteous governance > For believers in the political arenas of various nations to make a lasting impact**

## UPCOMING EVENTS



### **SAT-7 in South Africa: 11-19 March 2017**

Through the power of satellite television, SAT-7 makes the Gospel of Jesus Christ visible to millions of people who might otherwise never encounter it.

Rita Elmounayer, Deputy CEO of SAT-7 International, will be speaking at numerous venues across South Africa. All are invited to come listen to Rita's message of enduring hope in the Middle East despite all the challenges, hardship, war and suffering.

**For more information regarding venues and dates, email [francois@sat7.org](mailto:francois@sat7.org) or [CLICK HERE](#) to visit the SAT-7 website.**