

August 5, 2003

# BOMBING JAKARTA

**J**ust yesterday at lunch, the Mediachannel was hosting one of our advisors, visiting Indonesian newspaper editor Aristides Kaptoppo. (See reports below). He was discussing his hopes for economic recovery and the peaceful resolution of internal conflicts. A proponent of peace journalism, he was describing how a conscious media can play a role in bringing people together. He likened his efforts to the tiny pilot rudder on a supertanker which, though small, still can help turn a giant vessel around. The tone of the lunch was hopeful that Indonesia would be able to undo the damage to its image caused by the bombings in Bali a year ago. (A convicted and admitted bomber was to receive his sentence in just two days).

But then, a day later Jakarta time another lunch at the JW Marriott Hotel sent that hope up in smoke. A ferocious explosion blasted the American-owned hotel in Indonesia's capital killing 10 and injuring 70 earlier today. As is often the case with "breaking news" like this, I try to go to local sources which are closest to the scene. The Jakarta Post(Jakartapost.com) had several stories:

## **SUICIDE BOMBER STRIKES**

**"IT** is definitely a suicide bombing using a car," said Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono at the scene of the explosion. National Police chief Gen. Da'i Bachtiar said police had found the wreckage of a Kijang minivan believed to have been used in

the explosion.

"Our officers found the car's engine and chassis registration numbers, as well as its number plate," he said. "Based on this information we will start our investigation to find the culprits," he said. Da'i said the explosion left a crater of some two meters in diameter in the hotel's lobby.

The newspaper offered eyewitness accounts I didn't see on Fox or CNN which relied on correspondents. "An eyewitness described four separate blasts... I was going to take some pictures after the first blast when suddenly the second blast hit after about 10 minutes. The second was the largest of four," a journalist told The Jakarta Post.

"He said the second blast was the one that caused the crater in the hotel's Sailendra Restaurant. "I saw a hole in the floor of the restaurant going through to the basement. "I also saw two smaller explosions on the upper floors of the hotel," he said

AFP reports: "The bombers of the five-star hotel in Indonesia might have aimed at destroying U.S. interests here, Vice President Hamzah Haz said Tuesday. "Marriott is American. Whether this (blast) is aimed at destroying US interests, I think there may have been such an aim," Haz told journalists before attending a cabinet meeting.

"JW Marriott is a U.S. hotel chain and the hotel has in the past hosted many major U.S. functions, including this year's July 4th celebration. Haz did not elaborate but he quickly warned that it was

much too early to make any conclusion.”

## **TERROR OF TERROR**

**AND** so in this volatile world of ours, one maniac or a group of zealots can destabilizing a whole country. In many ways this attack couldn't come at a better time for the War on Terror proponents who will use this incident and a reported plot against Israel's Ariel Sharon to underscore the need for an escalation. Ideologist-in-chief Paul Wolfowitz, aka “Wolfowitz of Arabia” was on Charlie Rose's PBS blandfest last night to explain how well everything is going in Iraq, how “we are winning,” how the success in Iraq will transform the Arab world. Charlie, shall we say was as deferential as he often is with the power rangers who drop by making every effort to help him explain his view without any unseemly questioning.

Last week Calvin Bud Trillin of the Nation was on making the case against US rationales for the war. Charlie was cordial and seemed to agree. This week, it was the “Wolfman” who got the nod and wink. One interesting revelation is that this Deputy Secretary of Defense has seen no evidence that US troops were close to catching Saddam. Someone should pass that on to CNN which featured breathless reports on the manhunt in progress. To listen to their reports, you thought they were close to catching the big game. Apparently not.

## **“IRAQ-NAM?”**

**WOLFOWITZ'S** upbeat and politically self-serving view was challenged by London based columnist Gwynne Dyer who writes: “In the past week or so, Iraqi guerrillas have been killing U.S. troops at the rate of about two a day. Even if the fighting does not escalate any further, at least

1,000 more American troops will die in Iraq before the election in November, 2004. Welcome to “Iraq-Nam”.

“U.S. President George W. Bush continues to insist that the Iraqi resistance is just “a few remaining hold-outs” from Saddam Hussein's defunct regime because he needs this to be true. Otherwise, his invasion of Iraq would have been a dreadful mistake...

“However, the videos claiming responsibility for the attacks that are delivered almost daily to Arabic-language satellite TV channels attest that most of them are actually being made by radical Islamist groups within the Sunni Arab population.

“These are precisely the religious extremists who were suppressed by Saddam's resolutely secular Baath Party: Salafists and other radicals who long for a ‘pure’ Iraq purged of corrupting non-Islamic influences. Now they are free to act at last, and their first goal is to purify Iraq of American occupation troops.

## **MYSTERIOUS DISEASE STRIKES**

**LESS** predictable than the resistance is the mysterious pneumonia that has so far infected 100 soldiers. Lou Dobbs explored if there was a link to Gulf War syndrome that was denied by the Pentagon. We now know that 156,000 men and women were affected by it.

## **TV FEINTS RIGHT, MOVES LEFT**

**WATCHING** TV last night was a politically yin-yang experience. PBS seemed to have become the Bush Channel while David Letterman roasted the president's pathetic attempts to humor show-

ing a video of him laughing idiotically at a stupid joke and roasting CNN for another foopah. It felt like a left wing night on digital cable. Sundance was running a great documentary on the late insurgent journalist and media critic George Seldes.

I came in at the point that talked about his expose of Mussolini at a time that the New York Times was comparing him to Alexander Hamilton and JP Morgan was financing Italian fascism. There was Arlo Guthrie singing at Woodstock on TRIO while Rupert Murdoch's FX--not to be confused with the odious Fox News Channel where Bill O'Reilly was bashing Ben Affleck and Jo Lo--was running Oliver Stone's anti-Vietnam War movie Platoon.

### WALTER MITTY TIME

**OVER** in England, we have reports that Tony Blair's approval ratings have reached new lows. He may yet become the highest profile casualty of the Iraq War. Blair's official spokesperson Tom Kelly, last night was using the expression "Walter Mitty" when discussing what could have driven David Kelly to what is believed to be suicide. That phrase, suggesting that Kelly was less than sincere, comes from "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," James Thurber's best-known and most celebrated collection of stories. A movie website reports "In 1947, Norman McLeod directed an MGM Technicolor musical with the same title based on Thurber's story. The film, which extends Mitty's imaginary adventures over a two-day period, stars Danny Kaye as the affable daydreamer."

### PEACE JOURNALISM

### OFFERS HOPE

**MEDIACHANNEL** has had a great crew of interns this summer from a Tufts China-oriented Leaders program. Most came along to our luncheon yesterday. Here are two reports, the first from Shirley Chang from Tufts and the second from Kennon Tam from the University of Hong Kong:

"The Guest of honor was Aristides Katoppo who is a well-known Indonesian journalist and the editor of the recently revived Sinar Harapan (Ray of Hope). Katoppo, and his team of young journalists tout a form of journalism called 'peace' journalism. Its premise is that there are not simply two sides to every story; as the world around is not black and white, conflicts most certainly all have varying shades of gray. The phrase, 'If you're not with us, you're against us', brings me back to my grammar school days when if I was on the wrong team in dodge ball, I faced the entire game with dread, knowing that I was going to lose.

"Peace journalism rejects this two-sided approach because it breeds this exact sentiment. If all you read in the news is a chronological ordering of incidents of violence, you see situations of conflict as necessarily having a black and white, a winner and loser--forget compromise, forget hope. You see point A and point B, but cannot fathom that perhaps it is solvable problems like unemployment and low educational standards that come in between those points and exacerbate the violence. How people are effected in their everyday lives is often more important than isolated incidents of violence.

### LIKE A BLIND MAN

**"THE** Indonesian media is going through a Herculean transformation. To borrow a metaphor

used by Mr. Katoppa, ‘the Indonesian media is much like a blind person who sees for the first time. It wants to see, touch and experience everything’ and the journalists involved are doing some major ‘soul- searching to merge their new freedoms with their social responsibility. The challenge offered here is clear. It seems that the broader global media culture is being awakened to its recent absence of social responsibility. There is much evidence of this trend. Take for example: the BBC being accused at once of not protecting the identity of an informant (a basic tenet of investigative journalism) and also being praised for doggedly questioning who knew what and when in regards to the war; the media in Hong Kong steadfastly calling attention to the Article 23 legislation; and closer to home, the outpouring of criticism, from both citizens and media makers themselves, of the US media’s role in selling the war...the list goes on.

“Mr. Katoppo was asked yesterday if peace journalism “sells”. To which he answered that it would depend on how much the media focused on it. The market, he asserted, was guided by media attention. Journalists then, are being challenged not only to raise awareness of the problems, but also to offer solutions. If I came away with anything from Mr. Kotoppa yesterday, it was that journalists have an incredible power vested in them that most do not utilize. They can offer stories of anger and violence or they can offer stories that have a light at the end of the tunnel, hope. That, I think, is a brighter white than being on the “winning” team.”

### **ANOTHER VIEW: PEACE JOURNALISM DOESN'T SELL**

**KENNON** Tam adds “several points of thought

after today’s lunch and evening discussion:”

“1. It is mentioned that the concept of bridging journalism is to report the issue of conflicts from a perspective that could help solve the conflict and increase mutual understanding. It is criticized that media only focus on the confronting parties in the conflict, while often missing the victimized group, which can be the majority. This often leads to the failure to address the central issue or the reality. My opinion is that it is basically market-media dynamics. In the modern world of information overflow, when conflict happens in the ignored corner of the world, say the Middle East, people are not concerned with the underlying dynamics of the conflicts. They are only interested in what happened, how many died and injured, who is responsible, what responses major leaders make, and that’s all. This is the reason why fast food news reporting is prevailing.

2. About the motto “United in Diversity”. (The name of a conference slated for Bali in December that hopes to bring the various sectors in Indonesia together with international experts.) The concept is to unify a group which is culturally or religiously diverse. This is difficult as unity and diversity are basically two concepts, not to mention uniformity. Conceptually, it can be achieved by cultivating a common goal to the nation for the purpose of unifying, though the interpretation of the “goal” could be very different due to their underlying difference.”

“So there you have it, two budding journalists in print, disagreeing but thinking. We will continue to follow the Indonesia story. Later in the week we are expecting a visit from Jake Lynch and Anabel McGoldrick from England. They are two of the prime movers in the peace journalism movement.

**VERIZON WORKERS'  
DEMANDS**

**WORKERS** tend to get in the news when there are strikes, but their grievances are rarely reported. Here is a report from William Johnson at Labor Notes on what's behind this conflict.

“Health care isn’t everything . . . At least it seems that way right now, as workers in every industry are struggling to maintain their benefits in the face of rising premiums and diminished services.

“When contract negotiations between Verizon and its 75,000 union workers in the Northeast began on June 23, the company made it clear that making employees pay more for their health insurance was its top priority. Among Verizon’s proposals were increased co-pays, cuts in spousal and family benefits, and the elimination of paid sick days for new hires.”

<http://www.labornotes.org/archives/2003/08/a.html>



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