

Aceh's Local Elections: The Role of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM)

I. OVERVIEW

On 11 December 2006 local elections will take place in Aceh, the once war-torn region of Indonesia where ex-guerrillas are now running for office. The logistical challenges have been huge, particularly in registering so many people displaced by the December 2004 tsunami. But the political challenge has been even greater: how to ensure that the elections facilitate the transition of the former insurgency, the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) from an armed struggle to a political movement, thereby reinforcing its 15 August 2005 peace agreement with the Indonesian government. A rift that has emerged within the GAM leadership has complicated that transition.

That rift, which GAM spokesmen call “differences of opinion”, pits the old guard leadership that was based in Sweden throughout the conflict against younger figures who stayed in Aceh and fought. It erupted into the open in mid-2006 as the organisation sought to set political strategy and decide on candidates for the elections. In Aceh, unlike other parts of Indonesia, candidates without party affiliation are allowed, enabling GAM members to stand as independents. The old guard supported one party-backed slate for governor and deputy governor, the younger leaders an independent ticket. One of the candidates was physically attacked by his rival's supporters on 22 November in Bireuen, Aceh. On 27 November, in what initially seemed an effort at reconciliation, GAM announced at a press conference that it would stay neutral as an organisation. In fact, the division remains deep and could affect not only these elections but GAM's plans to build its own political party.

The split is significant because so much hangs on the December poll. For GAM itself, the elections are a test of political strength and an indication of how much work it will have to do to win the much more important 2009 elections, when seats in the provincial parliament will be at stake. Senior GAM strategists believe that if they can control that parliament, they can set the political agenda for Aceh's future. In this sense, the December elections are a dry run, and it will not be disastrous if

they lose most races, as long as they can get a respectable percentage of the vote.

For the armed forces and many Jakarta-based officials, the polls are a test of GAM's good faith. Will GAM candidates refrain from using the separatist flag or suggesting that independence is just around the corner? Senior military officers make little effort to disguise their suspicions that GAM is exploiting the peace to rebuild and regroup and is only paying lip-service to Indonesian sovereignty. (The regional military commander wanted all GAM candidates to swear an oath of loyalty to the Indonesian state but was persuaded to drop the idea.)

For many Acehnese in former conflict areas, the elections are a gauge of whether the peace will hold. An IFES survey conducted in September-October 2006 suggested 93 per cent of Acehnese believe the elections will help secure the peace but 55 per cent are concerned about violence, whether by ex-GAM, ex-militias, government security forces or political party supporters. Before the incident in Bireuen, there were fears that the military or intelligence service would prevent a GAM victory; that GAM would use intimidation and threats; and that long-dormant militias would reemerge as goon squads for non-GAM candidates. Now there are fears of intra-GAM violence as well, although both sides insist there will be no repeat of the 22 November attack, and the first days of the formal campaign, which began on 24 November, have gone smoothly.

This briefing examines how and why the rift occurred and its possible impact on the elections. It is based on interviews conducted during repeated Crisis Group visits to Aceh in 2006.

II. INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES WITHIN GAM

As part of the 2005 Helsinki agreement, GAM renounced armed struggle for independence in exchange for democratic political participation in a self-governing

Aceh.¹ In preparation for the shift from clandestine guerrilla to open political movement, it created two new bodies: the Majelis Nasional (National Council) in October 2005 as its supreme political authority, and the Komite Peralihan Aceh (Aceh Transition Committee, KPA) in December to oversee the demobilisation and reintegration of its fighters. GAM leaders hoped that both would consolidate the organisation during the transition, a process that would be reinforced by the eventual return of some of the Sweden-based exiles.

The Majelis was designed as the highest structure in GAM, answering directly to its prime minister, Malik Mahmud² and replacing one set up in Malaysia in the 1980s to coordinate the activities of ex-guerrillas there and provide logistical assistance to the fighters in Aceh. That first Majelis had virtually no political role, in part because it was so much under the control of the exile leadership, particularly Malik Mahmud and his then Bangkok-based defence minister and arms procurer, Zakaria Saman alias Abu Karim alias Karim Bangkok.

The new Majelis was meant to unite all GAM's political and economic resources in a single institution. The Malaysia-based Majelis was dissolved, and all GAM coordination centres outside Aceh came under the new body. In a closed meeting at the Rajawali Hotel in Banda Aceh, regional representatives chose Teungku Muhammad Usman Lampoh Awe (usually known as Tgk. Muhammad) as head; he had been finance minister in the first cabinet of GAM's founder, Hasan di Tiro, in 1976 and a negotiator during the failed peace process of 2002-2003.³ Muzakkir Manaf, leader of the armed wing, the Tentara Nasional Aceh (TNA), was chosen as head of security; his position below that of Tgk. Muhammad

was designed to show the military's subordination to the political leadership. Zakaria Saman was tapped to head the political section. Some Aceh-based leaders found his appointment odd since he hitherto had only a military role, choosing local commanders and determining where and how GAM forces would be deployed.⁴ The selections of Tgk. Muhammad and Zakaria, known for absolute loyalty to the Sweden-based di Tiro, showed the continuing strength of the exile leadership.

The Majelis was charged with determining GAM's political strategy: from election of village heads, through allocation of reintegration funds, to the relationship with the European Union-led Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM). It was also to be responsible for advocacy related to the Helsinki agreement (commonly known as the Memorandum of Understanding, MoU) through its secretariat for MoU Socialisation.⁵ It included figures like Muhammad Nazar, the head of a pro-independence organisation called Information Centre for a Referendum on Aceh (Sentrum Informasi Referendum Aceh, SIRA), who joined the political section.⁶

One of its most important tasks was to design a new body for ex-GAM fighters: hence the creation of the Aceh Transition Committee (KPA). Its structure exactly replicated the TNA's, with commanders at the district level becoming KPA heads in the same area. The difference was that they were not armed, and that every local office operated completely openly with a simple organizational structure of a head, secretary, and a few people in the field. Some in the Indonesian military and elsewhere remained suspicious of the KPA's motives, believing it would try to exploit the peace to secretly prepare for a military comeback. But GAM argued that its former fighters needed help making the transition to civilian life, and securing their economic well-being was paramount. As Muzakkir Manaf announced when he

¹ For analysis of earlier developments in Aceh, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°117, *Islamic Law and Criminal Justice in Aceh*, 31 July 2006; and Crisis Group Asia Briefings N°48, *Aceh: Now For the Hard Part*, 29 March 2006; N°44, *Aceh: So Far, So Good*, 13 December 2005; and N°40, *Aceh: A New Chance for Peace*, 15 August 2005.

² GAM's official name was the Aceh-Sumatra National Liberation Front; as an organisation that aimed at governing Aceh once independence was achieved, it was set up as a government with a head of state, Hasan di Tiro, and a cabinet that consisted of a prime minister, defence minister, finance minister and so on.

³ "Teungku" is an Acehnese title denoting a respected leader, usually with religious knowledge, and is abbreviated Tgk (not to be confused with "Teuku", another honorific that does not imply religious credentials). Tgk. Muhammad was arrested on 16 May 2003, immediately after the peace agreement collapsed, and sentenced to thirteen years in prison on terrorism charges. He was released from Sukamiskin Prison in Bandung on 17 August 2005 just after the Helsinki agreement was signed.

⁴ Crisis Group interview, Banda Aceh, 20 May 2004.

⁵ The secretariat was headed by the GAM spokesman for Pasee District, Syardani M Syarif alias Jamaica. Until Malik Mahmud returned to Aceh, Jamaica coordinated MoU-related matters between Aceh and Sweden. Crisis Group interview, Banda Aceh, 28 December 2005.

⁶ Nazar's inclusion in the Majelis was his first formal acknowledgement of affiliation with GAM, a link he had long denied. He was first arrested on 20 November 2000 on incitement charges after SIRA organised a huge pro-referendum rally in Banda Aceh. He was given a ten-month sentence, released in October 2001 and arrested again on the same charges in February 2003. This time he was sentenced to five years but was released on 30 August 2005 as part of the post-Helsinki amnesty.

dissolved the TNA, "the main goal of the KPA is to see that former fighters get jobs"⁷.

GAM spokesman, Sofyan Dawood, denied there was any other agenda.⁸ He said the KPA would ensure that ex-combatants abide by the terms of the MoU. He also suggested that, consistent with GAM's political aspirations, it would become the foundation of a local party.⁹

On 19 April 2006 Malik Mahmud returned to Aceh for the first time in 40 years. Accompanied by the movement's foreign minister, Dr Zaini Abdullah, he embarked on a political tour across Aceh, meeting with GAM members and convincing them that peace was their best option. Everywhere they went, from the east coast to the west, they were greeted by thousands curious to get a glimpse of GAM's second and third in command. The governor of Aceh, Mustafa Abu Bakar, received Malik and Zaini personally, with a special ceremony (*peusijuek*) at his residence in Banda Aceh.¹⁰

An important step towards reconciliation took place there because 84-year-old Tgk Idris Mahmud alias Abu Rih, father of one of the highest profile victims of the civil conflict, attended. On 16 September 2000, Safwan Idris, the rector of the Ar-Raniry State Islamic Institute, one of Aceh's premier educational institutions, was shot dead at his home. Although no one ever claimed responsibility, and many at the time blamed the Indonesian military, GAM sources say the murder was very likely the work of a member of GAM Aceh Besar.¹¹ Abu Rih nevertheless performed the ritual welcome prayers for Malik and Zaini, a symbolic acceptance of their return by Acehnese not involved with GAM and a way of implicitly setting aside past political conflict for the sake of peace.

⁷ "Riwayat TNA yang Terhenti", Media Centre Aceh, 28 December 2005.

⁸ Crisis Group interview, senior GAM official, Banda Aceh, 28 December 2005.

⁹ Crisis Group interview, Banda Aceh, 28 December 2005. The law on Aceh government passed in July 2006 allows local political parties in Aceh. The political party law that applies to the rest of Indonesia requires a party's presence in 50 per cent of the country's provinces and 50 per cent of the districts in each province.

¹⁰ "Malik dan Zaini di Peusijuek di Meuligoe", *Serambi Indonesia*, 21 April 2006. Prior to the ceremony, with a reported 2,000 onlookers, Malik paid his respects at the grave of Tgk. Cik di Tiro, the legendary hero of the Acehnese resistance to the Dutch and the ancestor of GAM founder, Hasan di Tiro. Malik and his entourage also visited a displaced persons camp in Lamkruet village and the mass grave for tsunami victims in Lhoknga.

¹¹ Crisis Group interview, May 2006.

Malik's return for a time helped GAM's organisational consolidation, uniting top commanders in the interest of implementing the MoU. The Majelis Nasional even became known as the Majelis Peudong MoU (MoU Enforcement Council), with nearly every district involved in pulling in local resources to address reintegration, preparation of the bill on the governance of Aceh and local elections.¹²

III. OLD GUARD AND YOUNG TURKS

With Malik's return, the question was whether GAM Sweden would contest the elections for governor, mandated by the MoU to be held by 31 March 2006.¹³ From the beginning, Malik indicated otherwise. He did not want to put himself forward, in part because he was still registered as a Singapore national and was in the process of getting Swedish citizenship, although he said he would like to become an Indonesian once all peace process issues were resolved.¹⁴

If not GAM Sweden, then who within GAM would stand for governor, assuming independent candidates were allowed? Malik made no move to announce a decision, saying GAM was waiting for the Aceh government bill to be passed. He did admit that several names were being considered, including Hasbi Abdullah, a university economics lecturer and the younger brother of Dr Zaini Abdullah; Teuku Kamaruzzaman and Teungku Nashruddin bin Ahmed, both GAM negotiators for the 2002 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA); Sofyan Dawood, KPA spokesperson; Muhammad Nazar, head of SIRA; and Irwandi Yusuf.¹⁵

Irwandi is the leader of the "young Turks" within GAM. Born in Bireuen in 1960, he graduated from Syiah Kuala University in 1987 with a degree in veterinary science and joined its faculty a year later. In 1990 he joined GAM, after the Soeharto government launched an

¹² Despite its limitations, the Majelis Nasional tried to provide political direction to all local GAM members. While this concentration of leadership in some cases resulted in the loss of local initiative, it helped to unite GAM's top commanders during the transition. Crisis Group interview, former GAM Peurelak military spokesman, Teuku Cut Kafrawi, 1 August 2006.

¹³ The elections were delayed until December as the Indonesian parliament debated a bill on Aceh government that among other things would determine whether independent candidates could stand.

¹⁴ "Petinggi GAM Ingin Kembali Jadi WNI", *Suara Merdeka*, 28 April 2006.

¹⁵ "GAM Tetap Belum Tentukan Sikap Calon Gubernur", *Serambi Indonesia*, 28 April 2006.

intensive counterinsurgency campaign in Aceh. He received a scholarship to Oregon State University in the U.S. in 1993, and while studying for a master's degree in veterinary science there, he travelled to Latin America where he received training in the theory and practice of guerrilla warfare. Armed with this know-how, he entered the GAM military central command in Tiro on his return, helping Muzakkir Manaf and Sofyan Dawood, initially as a propagandist, then as a speech writer. His greatest contribution was a review of the GAM military structure that led to its reform and the formation of guerrilla intelligence units in 2000.¹⁶

In 2003 Irwandi was arrested in Jakarta, tried and sentenced to seven years for rebellion, increased to nine on appeal. When the tsunami struck Aceh on 26 December 2006, he escaped a flooded prison, made his way abroad and became important behind the scenes during the Helsinki negotiations. When the Aceh Monitoring Mission was deployed, Irwandi was its GAM liaison. From the outset, he was impatient with the exile leadership, seeing it as out of touch and autocratic.

In his view, the old guard's support of Hasbi Abdullah for governor, first suggested in February 2006, was symptomatic of its tone-deafness. Hasbi had solid GAM credentials on the surface. He followed his older brother into the movement in 1976 and was imprisoned twice. He also had an impeccable revolutionary lineage.¹⁷ But

he was not popular among the field commanders, who saw him as having contributed little to the struggle, despite his time in prison. He had never fought and virtually disappeared from view after his second release in September 1998, moving to Bandung, West Java to complete his doctorate. According to his detractors, he gave GAM no support during the 2003-2005 military emergency in Aceh and made no intellectual contribution to the Helsinki process. Irwandi said dismissively that Hasbi was not even a GAM member, just a member's younger brother, and his old guard backing was due solely to his absolute loyalty to them.¹⁸

As the leadership increasingly leaned toward Hasbi, the younger generation just as clearly leaned away, insisting that his nomination was not official. Many GAM members accused their leaders – more precisely, Zaini, Zakaria, Ilyas Abed and Tgk. Muhammad – of undemocratically selecting a candidate, with Malik's approval, before the Majelis Nasional had discussed the matter. The issue became not just who the candidate would be, but whether decision-making within GAM was going to be top down or bottom up.

IV. THE RIFT DEEPENS

In May 2006, at the first all-Aceh meeting of KPA members since Malik's return, the issue of candidates was so sensitive that all talk of it was avoided – despite the fact that the meeting had originally been called to consolidate GAM before the elections.¹⁹ According to Irwandi, whether or not GAM would stand in the local elections depended on the bill on Aceh government. He said that if it was in keeping with the spirit of the MoU and the aspirations of the Acehnese people, there was a possibility GAM would immediately form a political party, adding that the network was already in place to contest the local elections and only needed to be revitalised.

Another major issue was whether GAM should field its own slate of candidates or form a coalition with existing parties. Initially, all agreed that there would be no coalition, a decision reinforced at an April 2006 meeting of GAM leaders in Sweden.²⁰ But Zakaria changed his

¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, Irwandi Yusuf, 17 August 2006. According to the former Peureulak GAM military spokesman, Teuku Cut Kafrawi, in an August 2006 interview, the new structure, which put more decision-making power in the hands of local commanders, was abandoned after the Indonesian government declared a military emergency in 2003, to avoid duality of command and to shorten the chain of command.

¹⁷ Hasbi Abdullah was born in Trubue, Pidie in 1946. His father, Tgk. Abdullah Hanafiah, was a religious scholar and school teacher affiliated with Daud Beureueh, the leader of the Darul Islam (DI) rebellion in Aceh, who appointed him governor of DI's Pidie district. Hasbi was chair of the student council at Syiah Kuala University, 1973-1976, and chair of the Banda Aceh branch of the Indonesian Muslim Students Association (HMI), 1974-1976. He followed his elder brother, Zaini, into GAM in 1976. Arrested in 1977 in Banda Aceh for handing out GAM leaflets, he was freed after two years but detained again in 1984 on suspicion of assisting the flight of GAM leaders Zaini Abdullah, Zakaria Saman, and Daud Paneuk to Malaysia and was sentenced to two and a half years in jail. In 1990 he was sentenced to twelve years in prison for helping Abu Pieyeung, former DI leader in Montasik, Aceh Besar, supply nine DI firearms to GAM. In 1999 he was rehabilitated and freed by the Habibie government. He is currently an economics lecturer at Syiah Kuala and studying for his doctorate at Padjajaran University, Bandung. In 1989, Hasbi was appointed a member of the board of experts of the

Aceh branch of the United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, PPP). Crisis Group interview, Hasbi Abdullah, 3 August 2006.

¹⁸ "Dan Muzakkirpun Menangis", *Acehkita.com*, 11 September 2006.

¹⁹ "GAM Belum Bahas Pasangan Calon", *Serambi Indonesia*, 5 May 2006.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Nazar, 10 July 2006.

mind after meeting Humam Hamid, and the idea of a Humam-Hasbi ticket was born. Humam, a PhD in sociology and one of Aceh's most respected intellectuals with a long track record of social and environmental activism, was not a GAM member. When he met Zakaria in April, he had already been tapped as a candidate for governor by the United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, PPP), a national party with an Islamic orientation and a well-entrenched structure in Aceh that had represented the loyal opposition during the Soeharto years. He argued that since GAM was an important political force, as well as being key to the transformation of the conflict, a coalition between GAM and non-GAM leaders in Aceh was inevitable.²¹ It was also important, he said, that GAM win something in the local elections to cement its commitment to political participation; coalition with a party that had resources and an established infrastructure was one way to do this.

Negotiations over a possible coalition were complicated. To begin with, the PPP wanted Humam to stand for governor, not deputy, but GAM leaders, especially Tgk. Muhammad and Zakaria, wanted the reverse. Humam in the end agreed to stand for deputy on condition that his name was put forward as an independent, not a PPP candidate.

The Majelis Nasional addressed these issues at a Duet Pakat Bansa Aceh Sigom Donja (Congress of Acehnese from around the World), attended by some 250 GAM members at Syiah Kuala University, 22-23 May 2006.²² According to Sofyan Dawood, the purpose was to formulate strategy for local elections, although in the event several topics were discussed, including the reintegration of ex-TNA members.²³ The real focus, however, was on selection of a GAM candidate for governor. Tension between the young generation and the old guard was palpable.

Tgk. Muhammad put forward Humam's name, but the younger leaders argued that he was not a GAM member. In an attempt to block a Humam-Hasbi team, his opponents nominated Tgk. Nashruddin bin Ahmed, the former CoHA negotiator and a neutral figure. Since the

post-Helsinki amnesty, he had distanced himself from the movement's internal politics and spent most of his time in Matang Glumpang Dua, Bireuen, setting up a brick factory. Ironically, it was this lack of political ambition that brought about his nomination, and he quickly picked up support.

The separate votes for governor and deputy governor candidates revealed an almost even division between the developing camps. Nashruddin, Muhammad Nazar, Hasbi, Humam, Irwandi and three others received votes.²⁴ Nashruddin led this intra-GAM poll for governor with 39 votes and had seven votes for deputy governor. Nazar received 31 votes for deputy and just two for governor. Hasbi secured 34 votes for governor, only three for deputy. Irwandi got nine votes for governor, three for deputy, while Humam received 24 votes for deputy, and two for governor. Zakaria defended Humam's candidacy against charges he was not in the movement, pointing out that anyone who objected need not vote for him.

Nashruddin, who did not attend, was informed of the results by a short text message. One GAM source said Ilyas Abed, who with the rest of the old guard was determined that Humam and Hasbi should stand, went to Bireuen to convince him not to accept the nomination.²⁵ Whatever the reason, he declined. His withdrawal sparked more discord. The old guard argued that if Nashruddin refused to run, the nomination should go to the individual with the second most votes, namely Hasbi. In theory, he should have been paired with Nazar, who had the most votes for deputy, but the two refused to be on a common ticket. Nazar saw Hasbi as weak and said Aceh needed strong leadership to ensure implementation of the MoU. On a more practical note, Hasbi and Nazar are both from Pidie, which would have reduced the attraction of the ticket in other regions.²⁶ Hasbi's choice for deputy was Humam, who had been slated as his running mate from the outset. The younger GAM members then asked for a new ballot but the Majelis refused this and tensions rose again.²⁷

Resolution was left to Malik Mahmud. To avoid more serious infighting, he announced a compromise: GAM as an organisation would not contest the local elections

²¹ Crisis Group interview, Humam Hamid, June 2006.

²² *Lakukan Duet Pakat, GAM Konsolidasi Politik*, *Serambi Indonesia*, 22 May 2006. The decision to hold this conference was made at a meeting in Sweden, 3-8 April 2006. Attending were two representatives from the U.S., five from Norway, ten from Malaysia, two from Denmark, two from Canada, one each from Sweden, Australia/New Zealand, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Medan, Rian and Batam, and 55 from Aceh. Each community chose its own delegate and covered travel costs. Crisis Group email from senior GAM official, May 2006.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ These were Shadia Marhaban, a GAM activist who became better known after 2003 as the wife of American journalist William Nessen; Adnan Beursansyah, a journalist who served almost eight years in prison and was severely tortured; and Iklil Ilyas Leube, a GAM commander from Central Aceh.

²⁵ Crisis Group telephone interview, GAM official, 28 November 2006.

²⁶ Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Nazar, 18 August 2006.

²⁷ "GAM Batal Ikut Pilkada", www.sirareferendum.com, 30 May 2006.

but any GAM member could stand as an independent candidate.²⁸

V. COMPETING TICKETS

The compromise left the Majelis divided. It also lessened GAM's chance to put a united platform before the electorate, confused the GAM membership and weakened the campaign for self government by diverting attention away from the debate in Jakarta over the Aceh government law. There was also now the risk that conflict might be sparked between the two GAM factions over the organisation's political resources, leading either to one faction's efforts to take over the other or a back-room decision by the movement's elite to throw their weight behind one side.

Trouble was not long in coming. The decision to withdraw GAM from the elections paved the way for Hasbi, with the blessing of senior leaders, to join a PPP ticket as Humam's running mate for deputy governor. Tgk. Muhammad, Ilyas Abid and Zakaria continued to support him, and with the adoption of a clever slogan ("Humam-Hasbi OK", shortened to H2O) the ticket quickly attracted public attention.

This quasi-partnership of GAM with a political party seemed to augur well for peace in Aceh and as such was attractive both to those who supported the old idea of "special autonomy" and those, including GAM members, who wanted more meaningful self-government. It was, however, anathema to those who saw working with a Jakarta-based party as a betrayal of 30 years of armed struggle, including most of the former field commanders.

In late June 2006, long before the official campaign began, Humam and Hasbi embarked on a political roadshow across Aceh. To generate grassroots support for the campaign that officially opened only on 24 November, they formed circles of friends in every district. Humam and Hasbi turned out everywhere to tell the people about their platform – a generic one of peace, justice and prosperity for Aceh – and most importantly, according to Humam, to introduce Hasbi to the new generation of GAM supporters. Thanks to Tgk. Muhammad and Zakaria, they got broad backing in Pidie but they had to work harder in other areas. In Humam's words:

We did not assemble the GAM supporters out of respect for the Council's ban on GAM members contesting the elections under the name of the organisation. But in villages, lots of KPA members came and invited us to talk with them. We didn't ask them to do it; they just came to us to pledge their support...²⁹

That support seemed to swing some hesitant GAM leaders in Banda Aceh behind the ticket, but only temporarily. By August it was clear that the law on the Aceh government would allow independent candidates to stand. Those in GAM opposed to Hasbi then decided on an alternative strategy for attracting KPA votes: putting up their own candidates, Irwandi for governor and Muhammad Nazar for deputy.

The Irwandi-Nazar ticket was first proposed at a meeting of KPA in East Aceh in early August, following internal discussions about the need for a candidate from the guerrilla faction to better protect GAM's interests in the new government. Despite the backing of the senior GAM leaders, grassroots support for Humam-Hasbi was lacking.³⁰

As a demonstration of their ability to mobilise the masses, Irwandi and Nazar decided to launch a peaceful protest against the Aceh government law³¹ through Nazar's organisation, SIRA, which in 1999 had organised a pro-referendum demonstration in the capital that brought hundreds of thousands into the streets. This time, by harnessing the momentum of the Helsinki agreement's first anniversary celebrations on 15 August, SIRA drew some 50,000 to Banda Aceh from all over the province.³²

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Humam Hamid, July 2006.

³⁰ Crisis Group interview, former GAM military spokesman for Peureulak, Teuku Cut Kafrawi, 19 August 2006. Nazar claims that he was not interested in the position of deputy governor but received so much support that he was "forced to stand". Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Nazar, 10 July 2006.

³¹ GAM disputed this law, particularly the articles on the regional government's authority, while accepting in general the parts that were not in contravention of the Helsinki agreement. It particularly objected to Article 8, which states that international agreements and laws of the national government relating to Aceh will be made with the "consideration and consultation" of the Aceh parliament, whereas GAM (and many Acehnese groups outside GAM) had argued for the word "approval".

³² This demonstration involved members of student movements, NGOs, and other civil society organisations. SIRA's own estimate of the crowd was 700,000. There were some reports of villagers pressured to join the march, but on the whole, participation seems to have been voluntary. President Yudhoyono and the Helsinki agreement mediator,

²⁸ "Gam Batal Ikut Pilkada", *Serambi Indonesia*, 30 May 2006. The decision was taken after Nashruddin rejected his nomination.

Nazar used his role as “GAM’s political-civil spokesperson”, together with SIRA’s rural strength, to get the blessing of KPA district commanders for the protest. Intensive lobbying of villagers by *panglima sagoe*, the lowest-level command in the old guerrilla army, produced thousands of demonstrators, as well as transport to Banda Aceh. The exercise showed that the old territorial jurisdiction was very much alive and that in post-conflict Aceh, according to Nazar, GAM’s strength lay in the KPA, the former fighters, and not the Majelis Nasional.³³

Irwandi and Nazar decided not to use the 15 August demonstration to announce their candidacy on the grounds that “it would be too crude and unethical” (although this did not stop Nazar from making a very political speech in front of the main mosque in Banda Aceh at the height of the protest).³⁴ Moreover, according to a GAM source, not all who came to Banda Aceh were Irwandi and Nazar supporters. Some were pro-Humam and Hasbi but joined to protest the disputed articles of the Aceh government law.³⁵ Irwandi and Nazar waited to declare their candidacy unofficially at a coordination meeting of SIRA leaders at Wisma Cendana, Banda Aceh on 20-21 August 2006.

Several GAM members suggested theirs was not the ideal ticket, but rather a reaction to the autocratic approach of the GAM old guard and as such a direct challenge to the Majelis leadership of Malik, Tgk. Muhammad and Zakaria. Feeling that the KPA was being hijacked, Malik Mahmud invited all district leaders to a meeting in Banda Aceh on 22 August 2006. There, its chair, Muzakkir Manaf, made the surprise announcement to the press that the KPA was throwing its weight behind Humam and Hasbi because there were no

candidates from GAM after Nashruddin’s withdrawal.³⁶ Muzakkir said: “We have a situation where no one else from GAM wants to contest the 2006 local elections, except Dr Humam Hamid and Dr Hasbi Abdullah”,³⁷ a statement that immediately sparked controversy within GAM. Many of the younger leaders believed the Majelis Nasional should have been convened again at this point to keep the old guard in check, particularly when opposition seemed to be growing.

Several GAM members claimed Muzakkir had been forced to make the statement. According to one, GAM leaders had failed to persuade the district commanders to back Humam and Hasbi, so when the meeting adjourned, Zakaria asked Muzakkir to read the statement, prepared in advance by the old guard, at a press conference. Muzakkir could not refuse because Zakaria was his senior and his former commanding officer.³⁸

Munawarliza Zain, a GAM member, spokesman of the Majelis Nasional and member of the anti-Hasbi faction, said in his official capacity that he did not accept the meeting’s outcome. He cited the Majelis’s May decision that GAM would not nominate candidates on a GAM ticket and that any members who stood would do so as independents.³⁹ Therefore, every GAM member was free to back any candidate. He publicly declared his support for Irwandi and Nazar, while at the same time pledging his loyalty to Malik and other senior GAM leaders and insisting that the movement remained united. The only change, he said, was that since the signing of the MoU, decisions would no longer be imposed from the top.

Martti Ahtisaari, were in Banda Aceh at the time but security cordons prevented them from seeing the marchers.

³³ Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Nazar, 18 August 2006. The role of the *sagoe* in GAM’s guerrilla structure has proved quite effective. During military emergencies, this structure determined operational and logistical tactics. It was the centre of gravity during times of conflict and the rallying point for non-armed mass mobilisation in times of peace. For more on the role of the *sagoe* and relations between local GAM units see Crisis Group Briefing, *A New Chance for Peace*, op. cit.

³⁴ Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Nazar, 18 August 2006. SIRA applied this strategy very deftly to Muhammad Nazar’s political platform. Nazar’s appearance outside Baiturrahman mosque in Banda Aceh to give a speech at the 15 August demonstration was greeted by a screaming crowd of tens of thousands.

³⁵ Crisis Group interview, former Bireun *panglima sagoe*, August 15 2006.

³⁶ See “KPA Dukung Humam Hasbi. SIRA Kukuhkan Irwandi dan Nazar”, *Serambi Indonesia*, 23 August 2006. The statement of support for Humam and Hasbi was read by Muzakkir after a meeting of senior GAM leaders, including Malik Mahmud, Zaini Abdullah, Tgk. Muhammad, Ilyas Abed, former GAM operations commander Abu Razak, Amni bin Ahmad Marzuki, former Aceh commander Rayeuk Muharram and several other GAM members, at Wisma Daka, Banda Aceh, on 22 August 2006. The day before, they met with the heads of several Islamic boarding schools in Aceh.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Nazar, 24 August 2006. Humam refuted Nazar’s allegations, claiming that he had the backing of the KPA chair, Muzakkir Manaf. A former GAM district commander and senior KPA leader said that backing for Humam came from Aceh Timur, Pidie, Pasee and Linge (Aceh Tengah), and that the Humam-Hasbi ticket could only expect support from a part of Batee Iliiek (thanks to the backing of former Batee Iliiek district commander Darwis Jeunieb), but there would be no support for it from Aceh Besar, Meureuhom Daya or Aceh Selatan. Crisis Group interview, KPA officer, 25 August 2006.

³⁹ See “Dukungan Humam-Hasbi Belum Bulat”, *Serambi Indonesia*, 24 August 2006.

Many ex-GAM guerrillas took a similar stance. The Aceh Besar district commander, Muharram, rejected the Humam-Hasbi ticket outright: "We don't back candidates nominated by national political parties. Our support is for GAM members put forward as independent candidates".⁴⁰ Or, as another GAM official put it, "we have capable people ourselves, why should we go for someone outside?" With such support, Irwandi and Nazar officially announced their candidacy at the KPA office in Lamdingin, Banda Aceh, on 26 August 2006, sealing their symbolic claim to the KPA structure.⁴¹

VI. MORE INTERNAL WRANGLING

A power struggle between the old guard and the younger commanders over the KPA was unavoidable. Muzakkir Manaf was trapped between the two sides. On the one hand, he was head of security of the Majelis and close to senior GAM members. On the other, as former commander of the guerrilla forces and head of the KPA, his authority depended on his acceptance by many of those who were rejecting the old guard's stance.⁴²

Muzakkir's influence among the ex-combatants was high, but so was Irwandi's. It was Irwandi who had directed the surrender of GAM weapons in the disarmament phase of the peace process and was primarily responsible for the welfare of former fighters. His popularity had grown rapidly after the peace agreement was signed, in part because he put in long hours at the KPA office and was always available to listen to the problems of demobilised guerrillas and help find solutions.

The rift placed some field commanders in a difficult position. In East Aceh, the former GAM operations

commander, Ridwan Abu Bakar (Nek Tu), opted to stay with the old leadership:

I don't know Humam Hamid and Hasbi Abdullah, but I do know Irwandi Yusuf and Muhammad Nazar quite well. But as for the local elections, I have to do whatever GAM leader Malik Mahmud tells me to. If I back Irwandi and Nazar, and they lose, then I wouldn't know where to turn. But whether Humam and Hasbi win or lose, I can go straight to the leadership about this.⁴³

Ridwan had said in May 2006 that Peureulak, the East Aceh capital, had not decided whom to back for governor. He was inclined to go with the leadership's choice but like many others in the military wing, he would only give his support to candidates who were "really" GAM; therefore, he would have to weigh "whether Humam was GAM and whether Hasbi was GAM".⁴⁴ It was not just a question of involvement in the organisation per se, but also of commitment and loyalty.

On 4 October, in an indication of the deepening rift, Malik replaced Irwandi with Zakaria as senior GAM representative on the AMM. The official reason was that Irwandi would be too busy campaigning but Irwandi dismissed this, noting that there were only two more meetings before the AMM mission ended on 15 December. Tensions between the camps rose further at the end of October, when two letters appeared under Malik's signature. The authentic one, dated 28 August, endorsed the Humam-Hasbi ticket. The second, with a nearly identical text, endorsed Irwandi-Nazar. The latter was unquestionably a forgery, but the question was whose. Irwandi denied any role and suggested it was either Indonesian intelligence or an effort by the rival camp to alienate his supporters from the Sweden-based leadership.

On 6 November 2006, KPA leaders from across Aceh met and signed a letter of support for Irwandi-Nazar. But five days later, a statement was released in the name of the Majelis Nasional that GAM's support for Humam-Hasbi was final.⁴⁵

In mid-November, polls showed the Humam-Hasbi ticket in a virtual dead heat with two other party-backed slates.⁴⁶ Irwandi-Nazar did not seem to be in serious

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Quoted from the day's news on the announcement of the nomination of Irwandi and Nazar.

⁴² Field commanders enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, giving GAM a kind of federalist structure. Muzakkir was responsible for ideological and strategic direction but most operational decisions were made lower down. Local autonomy was strengthened by the difficulty that GAM had after the Helsinki agreement in securing access to resources. The KPA received assistance for its secretariat in Banda Aceh and also cars, but each district had to raise its own funds for routine operational expenses. Most *panglima sagoe*, the lowest level of the GAM military structure, tried to support themselves by taking advantage of the post-tsunami reconstruction projects to sell materials such as sand and gravel in their former areas of operation and by seeking "non-binding contributions" [*sumbangan tak mengikat*] from local businesses.

⁴³ Ridwan Abu Bakar, quoted by a former GAM Aceh Timur leader, in a Crisis Group interview, 26 August 2006.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, former GAM Peureulak operations commander, Ridwan Abu Bakar alias Nek Tu, 9 May 2006.

⁴⁵ "Dukungan GAM Sudah Final", *Serambi Indonesia*, 11 November 2006.

⁴⁶ These were the tickets of Azwar Abubakar from PAN, a party rooted in the large Muslim organisation Muhammadiyah, with

contention. Several Acehese Crisis Group interviewed suggested that mud-slinging between the two GAM camps had hurt both: Irwandi was accused of disloyalty for breaking ranks with the leadership and of being paid by Yusuf Kalla to destroy GAM; Humam was accused of having helped bring about the Indonesian army's military offensive against GAM in 1990, when he was head of the Aceh branch of the state-sponsored youth organisation, KNPI.⁴⁷

Then, on 22 November, two days before the official campaign was to begin, Humam Hamid and a group of his supporters were returning from Medan, North Sumatra, in a bus when they stopped in a village in Bireuen, an Irwandi stronghold, at about 5pm. The bus, hung with "H2O" banners, was attacked by a group with sticks and pipes, and Humam himself was beaten up. The attackers were Irwandi supporters, and according to one account, reacted after Humam supporters had placed campaign stickers on other vehicles in the area. (Another version suggested the mob was lying in wait for the bus.) Irwandi's camp claimed this was a one-off incident and would not be repeated, but the incident raised concern that further violence could erupt if the rift is not healed.

On 27 November, the KPA called a press conference. With Muzakkir Manaf in charge, leaders issued the statement they had prepared three weeks earlier, at the 6 November meeting. They said that GAM was withdrawing support from the PPP-supported ticket of Humam-Hasbi; that the head of the KPA and all district leaders would stay neutral; that they were committed to a free, fair, secure and peaceful election; and that they would accept whoever was chosen democratically by the people of Aceh.⁴⁸

It was clearly a victory for Irwandi, because Muzakkir, buffeted by the two factions for six months, had come down on his side. But it was not the effort at papering over the rift that it first seemed. The old guard was nowhere to be seen, and Malik Mahmud's absence was particularly noteworthy. One GAM leader said that Muzakkir had spoken with Malik in Pidie and that he accepted the KPA's decision but had been so closely

associated with support for Humam-Hasbi that he would lose face if he appeared at the press conference. A GAM supporter of the Humam-Hasbi team, however, said the KPA statement had been engineered by its opponents and did not represent GAM or Malik Mahmud's position after all.⁴⁹ Two other GAM members who support the Irwandi-Nazar ticket said that if Malik did not accept the KPA decision, he would be finished as a leader.⁵⁰ Reconciliation, it seems, remains a long way off.

VII. PROBLEMS WITH REINTEGRATION FUNDS

As politics was dividing GAM, disputes over funding were creating other fault lines. One of GAM's biggest difficulties following the Helsinki agreement was access to resources. It had agreed to stop collecting "war tax" (*pajak nanggroe*) but that meant a major loss of revenue.⁵¹ Unemployment for demobilised GAM members also continued to be a serious problem.

Without the tax and other conflict-related income, GAM was counting on reintegration funds that the government was to make available to 3,000 ex-combatants under the terms of the Helsinki agreement. The government wanted to make any funding contingent on receiving 3,000 names; GAM leaders demurred, partly for security reasons, but also because control over disbursement of funds was critical to the maintenance of the command structure, now replicated in the KPA. Direct payments to the fighters could encourage even more independence within the movement.⁵²

The government eventually agreed to channel the funds through district-level KPA commanders. GAM leaders calculated how many of the alleged 3,000 were in each district, and the government paid Rp.9 billion [\$900,000] – three tranches of Rp.1 million [\$100] per fighter – to the commanders without insisting on individual names. Few, if any, fighters received the full allotment. A team set up to supervise implementation of the MoU (*Tim Pengawas Pelaksanaan Nota Kesepahaman, TPPNK*)

his running mate Nasir Jamil from PKS, an Islamist party noted for its anti-corruption stance; and Malik Raden, from Golkar, the ruling party under Soeharto, now led by Vice President Jusuf Kalla. Malik is also supported by PDIP, the major opposition party in Jakarta; Partai Demokrat, the party of President Yudhoyono; and PKPI, a small party led by a former military commander who served as a Soeharto defence minister.

⁴⁷ See "Muzakkirpun Menangis," *Majalah Acehkita*, 11 September 2006.

⁴⁸ Short text message from senior GAM official, 27 November 2006.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group telephone interview, GAM member, Pidie, 28 November 2006.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, senior GAM officials, Banda Aceh, 28 November 2006.

⁵¹ Between 2000 and 2003, for example, the region that GAM calls Pasee received tax revenues from about 350 stores in Aceh's second largest city, Lhokseumawe, between Rp.500,000 and 5 million per store per month. Crisis Group interview, Lhokseumawe, 24 May 2006.

⁵² See Crisis Group Briefing, *Now For the Hard Part*, op. cit., pp.6-8.

found that many received only between Rp.175,000 and Rp.200,000, and other studies suggested even smaller amounts.⁵³ Local GAM leaders readily acknowledged the lower payments but argued that they had many more people to support than originally calculated. In Bener Meriah district, for example, GAM leader Fauzan Azima said he had received Rp.102 million that he had to divide among 517 ex-combatants, meaning no one received more than Rp.200,000.⁵⁴

While GAM leaders argued that they also had to use the funds to support GAM dependents, such as widows and orphans, as well as non-TNA members responsible for logistics and intelligence, there were hints of luxury cars and new houses for some commanders at the expense of the rank-and-file. In July 2006, the TPPNK began demanding the names of the recipients in the interests of transparency; it also argued that the distribution of reintegration funds to 3,000 individuals was required by the Helsinki agreement.⁵⁵

As questions were arising over the Rp.9 billion, a much larger sum, Rp.200 billion (about \$20 million) was made available in February 2006 from the 2005 national budget to the newly established Aceh Reintegration Agency (Badan Reintegrasi Aceh, BRA). It was supposed to be spent by May. A further almost Rp.600 billion was earmarked for reintegration from the 2006 budget, to be spent by 15 December 2006. These funds would support not just the 3,000 ex-combatants but other former GAM members; former pro-government militia members, now euphemistically called "homeland defenders" (*pembela tanah air*, PETA); and the broadly defined category of "victims of the conflict".⁵⁶

From the beginning, disbursement was marked by poor planning and chaotic administration.⁵⁷ The BRA solicited

proposals for livelihood projects for the ex-combatants. Each of the 3,000 ex-guerrillas who joined with comrades to start a business would receive Rp.25 million (about \$2,500), with half disbursed when the project was approved and the other half when the BRA verified that it had been implemented. Proposals were developed through district-level KPA commanders and sent on to the BRA for approval, with the names of all ex-GAM participating in the project; funds were then to be disbursed through the same commanders.

By August 2006, the BRA had funded 29 proposals for enterprises involving 965 people. Even then, there was no certainty that the 965 had actually received their full allotment, or that all named in the proposals were real people. Only seventeen of the groups had reported back to the BRA on use of the funds.⁵⁸

Delays in disbursement created tensions between commanders and ordinary members and among GAM leaders themselves, some of whom were represented on the BRA executive board. The latter began to see the BRA's ineptness as a bureaucratic trap that could diminish their influence, and when they resigned in June over the inclusion of militia leaders on the board, it was probably with some sense of relief.⁵⁹ Financial control was a source of power but failure to deliver funds as promised could be a serious negative.

Complaints began rolling in from the field, mainly to do with the confusing standards for submitting proposals.

kecamatan and the population of the village...Individuals and groups who have already submitted proposals can present their proposals at the village level meeting for consideration by the community at large. However, existing proposals will receive no special consideration and will not be prioritised over any other proposals". See "BRA's Community-Based Assistance for Conflict Victims through the Kecamatan Development Program (KDP)", available at <http://www.conflictanddevelopment.org/Page.php?DesID=3&ArtID=248> and "BRA Siap Salurkan Dana Rp.593 Miliar", *Kompas*, 31 July 2006.

⁵⁸ "Dana Reintegrasi Tak Diterima Penuh," *Serambi Indonesia*, 24 August 2006.

⁵⁹ Sofyan Dawood, Fauzan Azima, Ilyas Abed, and Munawarliza were among the GAM representatives on the BRA. They resigned on 10 June 2006, effective the following day, after the agency brought in Sofyan Ali, head of an anti-GAM umbrella organisation, as a director. Irwandi stressed at the time that GAM continued to support the reintegration process fully and was only leaving the BRA "to facilitate the Governor of Aceh's streamlining [of the organisation]". Although no longer involved in the executive body, GAM was still a part, along with representatives of government, NGOs and donor countries, of the Joint Reintegration Forum set up to discuss general reintegration policy. See "Press Statement of the Free Aceh Movement, Senior Representative to Aceh Monitoring Mission, 10 June 2006".

⁵³ "Temuan TPPNK. Dana Reintegrasi tak Diterima Penuh", *Serambi Indonesia*, 24 August 2006. See also World Bank's GAM Needs Assessment, 2006, p.30.

⁵⁴ "Banyak Eks TNA Lupa Cara Bertani," *Aceh Magazine*, May 2006.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* GAM said this was true, but the MoU does not specify that name lists were required.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group Briefing, *Now for the Hard Part*, op.cit., pp.6-8.

⁵⁷ By early July 2006, the agency had received 48,485 proposals – too many to even register, let alone read, evaluate and fund, according to Crisis Group interviews with BRA staff. As early as April, the BRA had scrapped the idea of responding to them all and decided to channel funds for victims of the conflict through the World Bank's sub-district development program. (This decision was formalised through Governor's Decree No.330/106/2006 amending the decree establishing the BRA, No.330/032/2006). According to the decree, villages in target *kecamatan* (subdistricts) would receive block grants of between Rp.60 million and Rp.170 million (\$6,000 and \$17,000), "with the size dependent on the intensity of past conflict in the

In Aceh Timur, for example, many proposals were returned to the local KPA offices for failure to use the correct format. Lack of accurate information upset the local KPA leaders:

We were told to prepare proposals, but funds from the first instalment were all gone, and there was some doubt as to when the second instalment would be available. Then right before the period of the first instalment expired, we were told to work on the proposals again, but that turned out to be wrong too. Many ex-fighters complained, but we didn't know where to pin the blame. It couldn't possibly be the fault of one party; after all there are GAM representatives in BRA, and Indonesian government representatives too.⁶⁰

GAM's difficulties in managing needs and expectations related to integration funding were exacerbated by deliberate efforts – one leader suggested Indonesian military intelligence but it is impossible to know for certain – to create dissension through false letters sent to GAM members. One, purportedly signed by Muzakkir and written in Acehnese, told KPA field commanders they could come to the GAM office in Banda Aceh on 3 June 2006 to receive reintegration payments from the European Union of Rp.10 million (\$1,000) each. The GAM office was flooded with claimants, whom Irwandi had to inform there was no money.⁶¹ Another letter, purportedly from Malik but in Indonesian (a language he rarely uses with GAM members) circulated in early July. It said the first letter was true but “we agreed to claim it was false because [the issues] have been overtaken by events. We are still holding the funds, and the plan is to use them to pay the special committee drafting the law on Aceh government and to send the rest to His Excellency Hasan Tiro in Sweden”.⁶² Members expecting reintegration payments were not likely to be happy that their money was going to Jakarta and Sweden.

As the FY2006 funds were being prepared for disbursal in August, Tgk Muhammad and Zakaria decided that GAM would allow individual members to receive cheques rather than continue payment through the commanders. This in effect conceded the issue of the 3,000 names, because any individuals listed in project proposals would have to go to the bank with an identity

card. This change in procedure seemed at first glance to reassert the old guard's authority. But it may rather have been recognition that GAM would lose out if funding was delayed longer, especially as allegations of ex-GAM members being involved in crime were growing.⁶³ Moreover, even if individuals would now get funds directly, KPA leaders at the district level would still determine whose names would be submitted, so the process would reinforce their authority.

Both sides of the GAM political divide recognise that their goals for 2009 depend on getting economic benefits to members. Both are worried about defections, crime and other consequences if it does not happen and realise that the potential loss of control would undermine all other objectives.

VIII. THE DISTRICT ELECTIONS

While most attention is focused on the GAM split in the governor's race, the district-level contests are also noteworthy. GAM is running independent candidates in all districts but Singkil, in Aceh's southwest. It has a good chance of winning in Pidie and at least a fighting chance in East Aceh and Sabang.

The split at the top has had some influence but not as much as one might think, in part because voters appear more interested in the local contests than the provincial one. In Pidie, the GAM vote is split between Mirza Ismail, who has KPA backing and is solidly in the Humam-Hasbi camp, and Faisal Saifuddin, a former political prisoner who headed SIRA's office in Jakarta in 2002. Mirza is the stronger candidate but his chances would be better if Faisal were not running. In Sabang, Munarwaliza has allied himself with Irwandi, but

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, Ridwan Abu Bakar, 9 May 2006 (before GAM pulled out of the BRA).

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, Irwandi Yusuf, 20 July 2006. Crisis Group has a copy of the letter.

⁶² “Maklumat Hasil Rapat Tertutup Pimpinan GAM”, a one-page undated unsigned photocopied statement with Malik Mahmud's name printed at the bottom.

⁶³ “Aceh Aman, Tapi...?”, *Tabloid Acehkita*, 14-20 August 2006. Initially the sharp rise in crime after the Helsinki agreements was attributed to gangs coming in from Medan and elsewhere in Sumatra to steal vehicles, particularly motorcycles, but by May 2006, several high-profile robberies were linked to ex-GAM members. The robbery of Rp.25 million (\$2,500) from East Aceh district health service staff funds on 1 May 2006, for example, was carried out by four people, one of whom was reportedly M Nur alias Dek Gam, an ex-TNA member. Some members of the security forces suggested, without offering hard evidence, that GAM had not surrendered all its weapons in the disarmament phase of the peace process, leaving its members with weapons to commit these crimes. GAM worked hard to counter the belief that it was involved in illicit activities, in some cases helping the police to arrest former members. Crisis Group interviews, Sulaiman AB, 12 May 2006, and Rismawan, Aceh police headquarters, 19 July 2006.

maintains reasonably good communication with the old guard.

In East Aceh, two GAM slates are dividing the vote but along lines that have more to do with local GAM politics than the rift at the provincial level. One candidate for district head (*bupati*) is Muslim Hasballah, a former GAM commander in the Peureulak region and trusted associate of the late Ishak Daud, the charismatic GAM leader killed by the army in September 2004. His running mate is Nasruddin Abubakar, a SIRA activist. Muslim is close to the old guard and the Humam-Hasbi ticket; Nasruddin's links to SIRA put him closer to the Irwandi-Nazar slate. The Muslim-Nasruddin ticket has the full backing of Ishak Daud's successor, KPA commander Ridwan Abubakar (no relation to Nasruddin). The other GAM team in the East Aceh contest is led by Sulaiman Ismail for *bupati*, with Zulkarnaini Matsyah for deputy. Both are believed to be close to Ridwan's rival in the East Aceh GAM hierarchy, Tgk Sanusi. When asked if it did not hurt GAM to have a split vote locally, Nasruddin said cheerfully: "Yes, but that's democracy!"⁶⁴

Munawarliza, the Sabang candidate, said GAM's participation was important, even if its candidates lost every race, because it would give the movement a sense of where its strength was and what it had to do to consolidate for victory in 2009.⁶⁵

A. BENER MERIAH DISTRICT

One of the more interesting district races is in Bener Meriah, a district only created in 2003, with a population of 128,397 and one of the most ethnically diverse. It is about 60 per cent ethnic Gayo, 20 per cent Acehese, and 20 per cent Javanese, many whose families have worked the coffee plantations there for several generations.⁶⁶ A former GAM commander, Fauzan Azima, is in the race for *bupati* with a former militia leader and wealthy coffee grower, Misriadi, but both are likely to lose to the establishment candidate, Haji Tagore

Abubakar, who is supported by Golkar, PDIP, and five smaller parties.⁶⁷

Several analysts, including local civil servants, have predicted campaign violence in Bener Meriah, in part because of the intensity of the conflict there in 2000-2001 – particularly between GAM fighters and Javanese migrants – and in part because of the candidacy of the two former enemies.⁶⁸ Misriadi's running mate, Suterisno lost family members and possessions in a GAM attack.⁶⁹ But there appears to be more bad blood between Misriadi and Tagore, a former deputy speaker of the provincial parliament, because both have the same constituency and are competing for the same votes.

By contrast, Fauzan and Misriadi held a public display of reconciliation in front of thousands of their supporters, reading out a peace pact and pledging to stand shoulder to shoulder to uphold democracy in Aceh and the Helsinki peace accord. The ceremony was witnessed by the minister for information and communication, Sofyan Djalil; Aceh's governor, Mustafa Abubakar; Major General Supiadin, the regional military commander; and several local military and civilian officials.⁷⁰

Both parties believe they benefited from the reconciliation. Fauzan considers the government will be more prepared to control the militias; Misriadi reportedly sees an opportunity to gain more access to reintegration funds. The GAM leadership was not overly enthusiastic about the pact but made no attempt to veto it. Irwandi said there must be "political resolution of past events", though he would have preferred that the "militia"

⁶⁴ Crisis Group telephone interview, Nasruddin Abubakar, 20 November 2006.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group telephone interview, Munawarliza, 19 November 2006.

⁶⁶ Many of the Javanese arrived long before there was any official "transmigration" program but they still became a target of GAM attacks in 2000, viewed as interlopers representing Javanese colonisation of Aceh. The term "Acehese" is used both as a geographic marker, to refer to anyone born in Aceh, and as an ethnic term: those whose native language is Acehese.

⁶⁷ Tagore's running mate is a Takengon native, Sirwandi Laut Tawar, a classmate of President Yudhoyono in the Indonesian military academy, who claims descent from Toeren Mademun, a local historical figure. He was regional chief of police in Pidie during a counterinsurgency operation there in 1999. The Tagore-Sirwandi ticket is fully supported by Malik Raden, the Golkar candidate for governor of Aceh, and has, as one of its selling points, its access to top officials in Jakarta.

⁶⁸ The beginning of the end of the 2002 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement was in Takengon, now the capital of Bener Meriah, then the capital of Central Aceh, when army-backed, pro-Indonesia civilians attacked the office of the Joint Security Council (JSC) in 2003. The attacks by anti-GAM groups spread, marking the prelude to military operations in Aceh. For information on the GAM attacks that led to the formation of militias in Central Aceh, see crisis Group Asia Briefing N°14, *Aceh: Slim Chance for Peace*, 27 March 2002. Among the analysts predicting trouble was the head of the election oversight committee in Banda Aceh, Iskandar Muda Hasibuan.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, Suterisno, 10 October 2006.

⁷⁰ "Baru Sebatas Rangkulan", *Majalah Tempo*, No.24, 7-13 August 2006.

question be sorted out by the yet to be established Truth and Reconciliation Commission.⁷¹

Issues of concern to Bener Meriah voters include property disputes – several arising from the need to acquire land for new district government buildings – and resentment over the amount of aid flowing to tsunami victims rather than victims of the conflict.⁷² Tagore is promising to clear new forest land for persons displaced by the conflict, revive abandoned plantations and attract new investment. He and Misriadi both support creation of a new province, Aceh Leuser Antara (ALA), to be carved out of Aceh, but neither is making this much of an election issue. Fauzan professes concern about the environment and urges that the power to grant logging licenses be removed from the forestry ministry because of conflict of interest with its other task of forest conservation.⁷³ However, there has been no substantive debate, in part because according to the election law, campaigning could not start until 24 November two weeks before the vote. Many who want to see clear programs set out for Aceh's future say a huge opportunity is being lost by too broad an interpretation of what constitutes campaigning.

Activists in Bener Meriah are also concerned about delayed funding for the local office of the independent election commission (KIP) and the election oversight body (Panwasil). While both have now been set up, they were not in a position to challenge "Ramadan safaris" – tours of the district during the fasting month in September-October, when political lectures were given in village mosques – or the use of various forums to denigrate candidates before the start of official campaigning on 24 November. They have expressed concern over the accuracy of voter registration lists and acknowledge that many people do not know they are already registered. But despite its history, Bener Meriah seems likely to have a peaceful poll, and if there is trouble, GAM and the militias may not be the antagonists.

⁷¹ Ibid. Establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is mandated in the Helsinki agreement and the subsequent Law on Aceh Government, but the Aceh TRC is to be subordinate to a national TRC authorised in 2004, but whose members have yet to be selected.

⁷² "Bener Meriah Belum Merubah," *Modus*, Vol.IV, No.23, 2-8 October 2006. Several of the disputes involve efforts to acquire land for construction of the new district government buildings.

⁷³ Crisis Group interview, Fauzan Azima, 11 October 2006.

IX. CONCLUSION

The political distance Aceh has travelled since the December 2004 tsunami is remarkable. That GAM members would be contesting local office and the Indonesian government would permit it seemed unthinkable two years ago. Both parties deserve credit for making the Helsinki agreement hold, and the 11 December elections are an important reinforcement of the peace process. But peace is still a work in progress.

GAM has shot itself in the foot with the rift between its old guard and the Irwandi forces. If what Sukarno once called the "old established forces" triumph, putting Malik Raden, the Golkar candidate, or Azwar Abubakar, the PAN candidate, in the governor's seat, some GAM members may question why they opted for political participation in the first place. There will inevitably be internal recriminations about who lost what and whether GAM could have won if it had stayed united.

It might not be a bad thing for GAM to win a few district offices but lose the governorship. Losers in democratic elections can escape responsibility for the mistakes and missteps of victors. By 2009, if a popularly elected gubernatorial team does not deliver greater security and prosperity, the audience for an alternative GAM platform will increase.

However, the rift at the leadership level has prevented GAM from focusing on a coherent strategy for its political future or for achieving genuine self-government for Aceh. It will be harder to develop a political party for 2009 if energies are dissipated by in-fighting. The reaction against autocratic decision making is understandable but it raises the question of whether GAM will be able to hold together as a political bloc – especially given its lack of resources and the economic difficulties of its members.

The rift evident in December 2006 could be a natural outcome for a guerrilla group catapulted into the political sphere faster than it wanted, and perhaps GAM will reunite after the elections. But it could also fracture further, leaving governance to other Acehnese political groups. Either way, the negotiations that GAM undertook in Helsinki have set the stage for a stronger, more democratic Aceh, whether or not its own people take charge.

Jakarta/Brussels, 29 November 2006

APPENDIX A

MAP OF INDONESIA

