Beyond Hope and Faith

Indonesian Students Society of Greater Manchester– At a Glance

"Only a culture without hope cannot forgive – a culture that does not believe in progress or redemption. Have we so little faith in ourselves we cannot accept the possibility of maturation, change, cure?"

(Blake Morrison, 1997 – in a poet "As If")

Being apart in about 14,000 km distance, or nearly 22 hours in a non-stop flight from the homeland, has somehow brought togetherness among Indonesian students in the very centre of north-west part of England, the-so-called city of Manchester. And, yes, here we are, the PPI-GM. Becoming its member, just simply creates –or recreates?—a second identity, distinct from the label "student" electronically stamped on our student ID. By then, the community starts to step ahead: a real life in the historical city where the industrial revolution started, with its up and down, happiness and sadness, joy and sorrow …

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Indonesia? This is the common *word*, yet with the question mark, that we've usually got as the reply when we at the first time introduced ourselves. Bali, with no doubt, has been more widely well known than Indonesia, which is in the contrary, a country with more than 13,500 islands and 220 million population! Or, one might say and identify us as a citizen of a country in sustainable political transition and social turmoil…. Well, this is the fact. So what? Apart from the unbalanced media cover about recent crises that have been taking place in our beloved country, we are questioning ourselves about what lies beyond our temporary goals of being a student here. The answers remain blur, fuzzy, stays hidden behind our bliss that we are lucky to experience living abroad. But, this is the paradox: realising it, ties us in unity and togetherness, as society whose culture –and hope!



This 2000-2001 PPI-GM committee stepped ahead quite slowly. We marked our year-of-service with an intellectual event, "One Day Workshop", in fall 2000, one month after the committee were democratically elected by the members. In this workshop, indeed we started to get to know each other from what they had been doing as either a student or researcher. That was excellent, that we had an opportunity to clinch the other members –even not only from PPI-GM but also from other PPI regions. For sure, the event was intellectually challenging and emotionally rewarding. That event marked clearly that this year committee had stepped ahead. One, first step.

The next steps were difficult to count as they were manifested into routine, simple but well coordinated gatherings such as "*pengajian*" for adults and kids, football plays in Smedley Park. They contributed significantly the society with a "being in a family" feeling. Sometimes, an invitation for a football game against neighbouring society –e.g. Malaysian Society and Libyan Society—became a real joy in the middle of tiring, exhausting and boring (it did happen!) study time. Thus, when there was no invitation, yup, we invited them! Not for the sake of who won that mattered, but for the sake of joy. Joy –the real one—has been very expensive in such modern city where everything are artificial and superficial, rewarded by bunch of poundsterling and scrap of pences.

Is joy the only one that matters? No, of course not. Because joy sometimes means acknowledgement as well. It was proven when PPI-GM joined sport event held by PPI-London in winter 2000. The mixed-double badminton team of PPI-GM had successfully got the second winner award. Why the second one? This was sport, dude! Not the verdict that mattered, but the participation for it supported –although little—the other PPI's involvements. And for us, the event was just encouraging us to stay closed, bond and to be familiar one another. To some extent, this closeness helped us fighting the cruel, freezing

weather of winter which snowed Manchester, swathing and jacketing it in a total white colour. Fantastic.

The time flew. The winter had been over, and so had the spring. But not the examinations and courseworks. As dominated by masters students, the PPI-GM committee was reluctant to hold a massive, stunning event while lecturer's assignments were still in the long queue ahead. So, we suspended so many activities we really would like to do. The list was there, but the realisation would have to wait. Until the time came, when all examinations, regardless their results were gone away, with the wind of summer.

In the end of June 2001, with a very high level of confidence, we launched the "Indonesian Evening" event, took place in William Kay House, International Society. It simply aimed to introduce what Indonesian culture looks like. With a minimum preparation of no more than 30 days, but with maximum enthusiasm, we finally managed to work collaboratively, presenting a quite wide range of culture performances, topped with one of our highest pride: Indonesian cuisines.

Pencak Silat, a traditional martial arts performance as well as *Kandagan*, a Sundanese dance were just few of what had been presented. To name them all, there would be just a long list to forget easily. But as happening marks, *Angklung* ensemble presented by students and also by those cute kids could not be missed, in addition to two Balinese dance shows that of course brought the warm, exotic tropical atmosphere into the midst of uncertain summer weather at Manchester. Indeed, there were many other performances such as medley of folksongs, teenager's vocal group, solo guitar, *keroncong*, and many more. And, in one word, all were just nice. Nice? That was certainly not enough to express the feeling. Norma, a 12 years, great Balinese dancer, confessed that she was dancing in a nearly 40 degree centigrade fever she had! Caution and advice could



not stop her from dancing in that event, showing the solidarity and a real meaning of togetherness among Indonesians, in front of other people.



When one of the International Society staffs said, "This is really great. This evening is really yours," he really meant it. That night was ours. With no purpose at the beginning, finally we had shown what co-operation, collaboration, togetherness and unity means. Happy, then? We deserve for that feeling. But it did not stop there …

15 July 2001, the Manchester City Council held a public event at Crumpsall Park. And PPI-GM was invited, not merely representing the students but the society itself. We prepared to perform at least three shows that comprised of two Balinese dances and *Angklung* ensemble (yes! We were finally confident enough to go through *Manuk Dadali* song in the ensemble with no error!). The preparation was just all right and so was the high spirit. But the weather did not seem to be cooperative to us. Rain and wind had blown our enthusiasm from the very beginning we stepped into the yards and –oh no—the fact had clearly showed that the event organiser was totally unprepared! The stage was simply indecent for a performance, nor was the electricity available for a so-called "performance". We had –or to be more precisely, we were forced—to wait until everything ready. But, that was not only for us. The Lord Mayor of Manchester was also just powerless in front of the unfamiliar weather and unprepared team and had to leave the park even before any performance started.

Finally, after waiting for ages, we decided to present one Balinese dance –instead of two—and *Angklung* ensemble. As usual, Balinese music has magical effect to attract people to come and to gather, and so did it. Norma –now had been recovered from fever—danced very beautifully followed by the *Angklung* performance. Although never meant to

be performed outdoor, we had tried our best to play *Angklung* as loud as possible. So there were two challenges at that time: a quite cold weather and noisy audiences. However, we managed to overcome them. An appearing of Norma in the local newspaper the next day had shown that our effort was not meaningless.



A carnival atmosphere

WIND and rain couldn't dampen the spirits of Crumpsall revellers during last weekends' Carnival.

Despite the miserable weather local residents still turned out in force last Sunday for Crumpsall's fifth annual carnival.

The day started with a fancy dress procession from Herristone Park and a horse and pipe band.

The procession marched to Crumpsall Park where there were stalls selling food, live music and dancing from an Indonesian group of musicians, face painting, songs from the Abraham Moss Youth Theatre's production of Annie, 6-a-side football, tennis coaching, fitness challenges, kwik cricket and basketball.

Organiser and secretary of the Friends of Crumpsall Park Joanne Green said: "A great day was had by all who were there once the weather had cleared up. It was really fantastic."

Anyone who wants to help with next year's event can contact Joanne on 740 8978.

From Crumpsall Park, we moved on to Queens Park.

That was on Saturday 21 July 2001, nearly a week later after the event in Crumpsall, that we had another invitation to perform in a similar, yet more professionally prepared, event in Queens Park. Just like the occasion of inviting a guess from Oxford for the *Kandagan* dance in Indonesian Evening, we invited a couple of Indonesian artists from London to perform *Kencanarana* in Queens Park. *Kencanarana* was performed so beautifully in the terms of musical effect, dancing performance and harmony among them. No wonder of course, realising that the arranger was an Indonesian Ethnomusicology master student!

Queens Park event was not in the absence of –yes, right!—*Angklung* performance and Balinese dances. These two seemed to be embedded within the society, didn't it? And again, as in the Indonesian Evening, Ibu Gangga and Chandra performed *Panyembrama*, while the little Norma *Panji Semirang*. What about the *Angklung*? Nothing was so special except the fact that the music really represented our basic value, *gotong royong*, togetherness and unity. The traditional composition of *Yamko Rambe Yamko*, *Manuk Dadali* and even the "Sound of Music's" *Edelweiss* were just a simple representation on how collaboratively the instruments were played and arranged into harmony.

Tired after two consecutive performance events in one week? Of course. But behind the tiredness we valued another thing, that the so-called- *gotong royong* did really exist. So, we did not stop there. Instead, we move on. Another activity? Yes, it was.

Sunday, 29 July 2001 the sun shined and weather seemed to be so cheerful in Manchester. But not for some brothers and sisters in Aceh, in the Northern part of

Sumatra island who are still suffering from brutality and uncertainty of their lives. That day, PPI-GM held a discussion on Aceh's problem. The topic might be broader of being able to concern with the nation disintegration topic, but it would have just been too wide to cover. Fortunately there were two speakers who were willing to share their views on Aceh. One was practician who had been deeply involved with the daily phenomenon in Aceh and the other was theoretician that tried to put the problem into a framework of conflict resolution. The discussion was great. Not only just because the essence of the content, but because of the solidarity and deep concern that had been shown as Indonesian students toward their brothers and sisters who are still suffering miles away from the Manchunian area.



The three consecutive activities –Crumpsall, Queens Park, discussion—had no power at all to stop PPI-GM for another one. More than 70 members of the society came together to visit Chester, a beautiful, small city near Manchester nearly a week later: Saturday, 4 August 2001. It took 45 minutes to get there on two coaches that were hired collectively. What a co-operation! Apart from the misinformation about the distance from Chester city to Ellesmere Port that almost screwed up the program, the trip was successful. The city was beautiful, the view was amazing and the moments were all delightful. There were too much to put all of the joys here. We noticed that clearly when the trip was ended. No single face reflected unhappiness or disappointment. Every single person of those more than 70 people abandoned the coaches and went back home cheerfully, full of pleasure.

The pleasure continued.

A week after Chester, the female students and housewives initiated–again—an event of *sillaturahmi*, an Arabic word for social, family gathering, by having a summer barbeque. A simple moment, yet meaningful, when everyone could join freely, come and had some meals in an informal, familiar occasion.

This barbeque event certainly inspired the coming, similar event when Indonesians around the world are to celebrate our 56th Independence Day this 17 August 2001. In this moment, again, we –the Indonesians—would gather to express our unity. The barbeque will just be an event. The most important thing is the ability for us to keep the conducive atmosphere of having a good, tolerant, open, supportive communication among others. This reflects the very central concept of the nation-state of Indonesia that we certainly believe, pluralism in harmony. Just like the melody of *angklung*.

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The reality itself is multidimensional. And so is the reality of PPI-GM. If we carefully examine the mailist ppi-gm@yahoogroups.com (without pretending to be Yahoo! advertiser) that has nearly 200 message exchanges every month, it is also reflected there. The discussions are sometimes so sharp, the views are sometimes so bitter to swallow. But, the jokes are many times entertaining as well as supportive messages that are really supporting, and not lip services. This is the fact, that different views, opinions, explanations, stand points are there to understand, instead of to blame one another. This is the fact of the multidimensional aspect of us, the students in PPI-GM

Indeed, we have concern of what is going on in our beloved country recently and in the future, and yet, we realise that we take different positions and stand points toward it. However, we have the same hope for the "better Indonesia" and to some extent, the hopes have transferred into faiths. And there is nothing wrong with that.

Beyond that hope and faith, PPI-GM welcomes the ISSM 2001, an arena for researches and researchers, sciences and scientists to contribute for a "better Indonesia".

"If politics is the art of the possible, research is surely the art of the soluble. Both are immensely practical-minded affairs.."
(Peter Medawar, 1915-1987)

Manchester, 17 August 2001
narrated by Yanuar Nugroho for **PPI-UK**