



Interview by Ahmad Suaedy with Mustakim Adipradja, Jakarta, 2 January 2014

BA, Architecture, University of Melbourne, Colombo Plan, 1963

In 1963, there was announcement in senior high school, there was a scholarship to study abroad for those having good scores. It was offered by Australia, Russia, East Europe, and Latin America. At that time, Bung Karno was leaning to East Europe.

I thought it was good opportunity to go to Australia, my school at that time was State Senior High School 2 Bandung, my scores were also high of which average was 8, my English score was 8 too, and my scores were considered good enough so I took the test and interview, English test too.

My friend, Aziz Saleh, and I were successful so we got the scholarship. I took architecture and so did he. I also applied in ITB majoring architecture too and I was accepted, besides I applied in UNPAD majoring Medicine and accepted too. But I chose ITB. I had studied in ITB for 3 months when I departed because the departure was delayed at that time so the announcement was in the last minute, 2 weeks before the departure for going abroad. At that time, enrolling to university wasn't as easy as it is now.

After passing the test, we were quarantined for about 2 weeks if I am not mistaken, during that time I was given advices how to behave well with foreigners, etc. After that, we departed, first we landed in Darwin and then went to Sydney, because we were all gathered in Sydney, we were tested again in Sydney, because our English skill was considered lacking, while we were in Sydney from December 8th till February 6th we were trained to enhance our English. After February we were tested again to enrolment in the university. Those failing the test should repeat the next year, and I passed immediately. There was a friend namely Warno who was also a friend in ITB, he was in the third year in ITB. He once said that it would take much time if I didn't pass because he had taken 3 years in university. But, finally Warno made it. After the test we departed to Melbourne, we were not in New South Wales University because it was for the engineering. Because I took architecture, we enrolled in University of Melbourne. We had a boarding house there.

We faced difficulties in the first semester, because the lecturers used different English - it was Australian English. But as time went by, we got used to it. In the early years, because we were not confident with the language, we borrowed seniors' notes before tests. I was studying architecture for 5 years and also 1 year of work experience. After that I was able to graduate. Honestly, it was not easy for me because I had to retake 1 or 2 courses, which I'd failed.

During my work experience, I was in a part of the Victorian public service, taking care of post office and Telcom public buildings. My first time working in Australia, I couldn't find a job that fitted in my field, so I worked as a manual laborer.

While studying, we had the right to go home once in three years. Most chose to work rather than go home, because they could get money. I preferred to go home. All the expenses were supported as well. We were very poor at that time, our per capita income was \$1800 and Australia was \$4000. Now we have reached \$5000 but Australia is \$50000. It was so very



different. The system in Australia was good too. During our work experience in the public service, we were interns but we received a salary.

After graduation, we were required to report to PTIP, those taking care of the scholarships programs, because before studying we had made a pledge to our country that our knowledge would be used for good and we would be given jobs. I reported to PTIP twice, I sent letters twice, stating that I was part of the scholarship group and I had finished the study and asked for a job. I sent a letter but there was no reply. Finally I went home and visited the office, it was in Kimia street at that time After arriving there I found different people, I first talked to them and then they asked me to write my name and I waited. I came again, but there was no response, they said that the data had lost, the documents couldn't be found.

After that, I worked in a private company. People said that the company wouldn't accept me because the job was for the high rank officials' family, they preferred their own relatives. But I came to PTIP because there was a promise before departure.

The company was called James Very, the headquarters was in Singapore and the boss was Australian so we had something in common. It was still architecture. I was given real projects there, such as designing housing, factories, and the last was Lemigas building in Cipulir. I worked there for 3 years. I had a holiday and my little brother wanted to study in Australia, so I went there with him. There I was offered a job and my brother needed adjustment. It was in 1979, I was 29 years and already married. The second time I was in Australia, I worked for 2 years.

I got married in 1969. Before getting married, on my second visit back to Indonesia, I asked my future wife to go Bali, we rented motorcycle and went around Bali, and after a few days we went home by public transportation. I showed her some of Java. We stopped at Jogja too. I said that it was my town, she said, "I could live with you". After arriving in Bandung, we stayed for a few days and we departed again. We got married in Melbourne, which was close to my in-laws. At that time, I had finished my study but I hadn't joined the graduation ceremony. I had many family burdens, my little brother and the elder brother, so I decided not to have kids for the next 5 years.

When I sent my brother, he was in RMIT, there was no scholarship at that time in Indonesia. My in-laws kept an eye for us, they almost came every year to Indonesia to visit us in Jakarta.

After 2 years working in Australia, because we thought that our savings was enough, we had a holiday, going to Europe for 8 months. There I learned that Indonesian passport wasn't respected that much because I got many difficulties entering each country. It was different from my wife's Australian passport. We didn't stay in the same country for those 8 months. It was 6 months in Europe and we visited half of it, then we planned to go back home by land. We passed Italy, the south side of Turkey, Iran, and Afganistan, India. At that time the Shah of Iran wasn't Khomeini yet, and Afganistan was not yet under Taliban, we still saw the huge Buddha statue that was later destroyed by the Taliban. After arriving in India, Nepal, we felt tired, we stayed in cheap accommodation. That was why we then took an airplane to Indonesia.

In 1975, I went back to Indonesia, after having a holiday I took a rest. Then I worked in a company whose headquarters was in Hongkong. The name was Palmer Enterner. The company in Hongkong was very old, it might have been hundred years since the war time, they were the one creating the design of Bank of China. They had many works in Shanghai. I was placed in Jakarta, I worked on the Mandarin Hotel, Metropolitan Public Building.

In 1979, I was appointed to work in Singapore, the branch office was there too, working on constitutional project. My position at that time was as an architect. In such company, position wasn't functional, the point was the real work. The projects in Singapore were Standard Cal Bank, a 45 storey building, and other buildings. Three were completed in Singapore. I spent 3 years in Singapore. In 1982 a friend came to Singapore, the little brother of Benny Murdani, he used to be my senior in Melbourne, he said, "Mus, why don't we form our own company in Indonesia?" I thought, why not? But we didn't have to be poor.

Finally, I resigned from Palmer and created the same company in Indonesia, the capital was from us along with Muryanto Murdani. Because it was a service company, we didn't need big capital, but we had to give the impression to our future customers that we were able to design. It's quite good, because we designed Indosat office as the start. Coincidentally the founder was also my senior, if I am not mistaken, the name was Jonathan Parapak.

There was a client from Bimantara Group. We collaborated with architects from Sydney. We deisgned a building with 32 floors which now is under the ownership of MNC and belongs to HT. We also renovated Australian Embassy building which is in Thamrin street now. Besides that we worked on interior designs for big companies such as IBM, America Express, and BumiPutra Bank.

In 1983, that was the beginning of crisis. There was an owner from Singapore, we took roundtrips to Singapore, but it failed, at that time we had to fire 60 employees. We had to sell the company's vehicle to give severance pay to them.

At the end of 1989, there were only 8 people in our company. We stopped around 2000s and I was 55 years at that time, then I became a freelancer. In 2005 my ex-employee asked me to create another company, and I became a stock holder. And Mr Muryanto was there when there was Aceh Tsunami in 2004, he was sick and passed away. In the new company, I worked on projects for hotels and offices.

Once we worked on a project with all of our focus was concentrated there. The project was a collaboration with local government in East Kalimantan, the corruption was so huge. We hadn't done anything but our pay was cut 30%. The early concept was good, they want building something like a lighthouse, it's like Sydney Opera House in Sydney. We didn't want to cooperate with government after that. We first thought it was an achievement for the company.

All mark ups were done by them. The fund was for them, we were given nothing. Everytime the high rank officials come to Jakarta, we had to give them special treatment, they wanted to go to many places, spending millions rupiahs, we sent our employee to pick them up and go with them, because we weren't used to such a glamorous lifestyle. They once came to Jakarta and asked us to buy them laptops. If I counted the profit, we in fact suffered a big loss.

He was a regent in Kutai Kartanegara, East Kalimantan, he was imprisoned because of corruption as well. His child also had scandal for forbidden video, it is a daughter. When he was imprisoned, she ran for regent candidate and she made it.

I also remember Kang (brother) Ebet, he was an Indonesian joining the same scholarship program. But he failed and stayed there, he didn't want to go back to Indonesia because he had a wife in Australia. He said that Indonesia was a Mickey Mouse country, it would never die, either it was hit by car or stone, it would simply become flat and return the same as before. It can run and walk again. He described it that way, but after he got divorced he came back to Indonesia.

My wife once worked in the Australian embassy as a translator. Now she is an active member in social activities. There was an association namely ANZA (Association New Zealand Australia) which has social activities that are bigger than that of USA, American Women's Association. For example, their activities include every member creating a social project to sponsor. One is taking care of an old-folk's home, orphans, and scholarships for the poor. Besides this, she is a part-timer in Colize company, a property company, she works twice a week.

I still work on projects, but I only manage the younger staff. If there is a meeting, I will go to Cikini because the office is there, it used to take 45 minutes from my house to Cikini but now it takes 1 and half hour or more.

From my experience of being the grantee of the scholarship plan, basically we were far from our parents, there was a stage of being independent. There was a fear it was still difficult in Indonesia which was why I decided not to have kids for 5 years, because we live in cooperation principle, to help one another. Actually, it is not a good principle, for example we had to study but we didn't have money, we didn't put much effort because there would be a relative helping. It is not good, because of the dependency.

Now I come to Australia only once a year, to visit my kids. I have 3 kids, the first was born in 1979 in Melbourne, he is now taking PhD in science, he preferred education, research, and becoming lecturer. The second was born in 1981, in Singapore. He has married a Filipina and works as a pre-kindergarten teacher. The last was born in 1984, in Jakarta, he works in insurance. Now, the three of them are in Australia. They had their elementary until senior high school (2nd grade) in Jakarta, then moved to Australia.

They didn't live with their grandparents because I didn't want them to be a burden. I wasn't comfortable. So I asked them to live on their own.

They come to Indonesia only for holiday, and they have never worked in Indonesia. My wife still holds Australian citizenship. I want to move there to be close to my kids but many of my friends are here, my wife also has many friends here because she has been here since 1972, she is like a local.

I feel lucky being in Indonesia, because there are many changes during 40 years. There are many differences and I have been involved in the process. The young still need to grow their

confidence, because the confidence opens up opportunities, and though I didn't work in government, I feel that I have contributed to Indonesia's development.

It wasn't intentional when I became an intern, because there was challenge back then and I took it.

The biggest problem in Indonesia is corruption, only by increasing awareness, education level, and government support for education. The corruption begins with conscience, if we get good education then we can avoid corruption.

And the one breaking the system was Mr Harto, our mindset has now been turned around. Now, just imagine when there are many opportunities to be a civil servant, there are 100 out of 1000 people that are accepted. And they are designated at the wrong places.

We are still under developed. The problem of development becomes more complicated, moreover the malls nowadays aren't built based on the standard. That is why Jokowi stops the mall development and raises the rights of the small vendors.

The distance among walls is close to one another so that creates traffic jams everywhere, they eat up half of the road. While being in Jakarta, I never had any business with the government related to the architecture projects. There was once the kid of a general that became a leader in LPRI, the kid worked at our place, we were asked to make a proposal, but the kid wasn't that capable. So, we didn't take bother, and it was said that the project was taken by others.

I saw Jokowi on Mata Najwa (TV show), for his closing statement about leadership he said, "If you want to be a leader in Indonesia, you shouldn't take sides either political party, group, or even concerning on your own benefit. So that it can develop."

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