

A I A Two-Week Intensive Language Course—Jogyakarta, January 2007

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Having just completed the first Australian Indonesian Association of Victoria two-week intensive language course, I am basking in the afterglow. I have accomplished something worthwhile—my language study has made good progress and it's certain, too, that I have seen more of Java by being involved with the AIA two-week course than I would have seen had I wandered about by myself or followed the usual well-trodden tourist pathways.

The course began on the train from Jakarta to Jogyakarta when I borrowed a mobile phone from a fellow passenger and text-messaged Galang, the course leader. Galang is the owner of Pandu, the language school which worked with the AIA to develop the program. (*Pandu* means *guide*.)

Galang texts me back to say he'll be wearing a blue t-shirt with the word *Adelaide* on the front. We meet as planned and he drives me to his family home—large, comfortable and western in style. There is a sausage dog called Max belting around the front yard. (Moslems with dogs? I'm going to need cross-cultural awareness training.) The next morning turns out to be an important date in the Moslem calendar so the local muezzin hardly stops for breath. How will I ever sleep? Early next morning I join Galang's family and walk slowly, ever so slowly, to the town square where maybe 2,000 locals have gathered with their prayer mats—males at the front and females behind—to hear again the story of Allah's merciful intervention in Abraham's sacrifice of his son. After the short service there is to be a ritualised letting of blood. Galang's family have entered into the spirit of things and have provided one of the dozen or so goats and sheep that are tethered awaiting sacrifice. The animals' throats are slit and they are hung up and butchered in front of a small crowd from the local village. The villagers will all receive portions of the meat. Galang and I have seen enough and depart, leaving unanswered the question of how the men are going to manage the ritual slaughter of the two huge white bullocks which had been peacefully awaiting their turn.

When we return home Galang's family is watching a program on bull riding from the USA via Star channel (Malaysian cable). Galang explains that I won't be staying with his family—'We're not typical Javanese.' The course requires that I live with a typical Javanese family. Later that day I am formally introduced to my host family—more on this later. Conveniently, the host family live just around the corner from Pandu, where classes are to be held.

The AIA two-week course involves three learning sessions a day: a morning briefing (one hour); the daily 'mission' (two or three hours); a break for an hour or two for lunch and a rest; and later in the afternoon a two hour classroom session back at Pandu, usually finishing around 6.00 pm.

Before the course begins Galang spends some time going through the details of what the AIA two-week course expects of me:

[1] *that I am expected to use Bahasa Indonesia during the classes and the daily missions (i.e., the practical activities and tasks of the day)*

This turns out to be very challenging. Speaking any foreign language is hard work for a learner and it is very tempting to slip into English. More than once I reach a state mental exhaustion.

[2] *that I will be accompanied by an Indonesian during daily missions and that I will use Indonesian with this person*

My guide is a young male undergraduate, Niko. He is a native Jogjakartan and makes himself useful in all sorts of ways. He knows how to get around and how much to pay for things and how not to get ripped off and he's a walking dictionary and helpful at translating idioms and slang. He was very attentive to my needs—'Have you put your glasses in, David? Don't forget your hat.'

[3] *that the activities during the daily mission will be recorded on video with a handycam*

Pulling out a handycam and asking locals if they are happy to be interviewed is a good ice-breaker. Niko usually does the recording. Modern handycams are very easy to use and the results are quite satisfactory.

[4] *that daily missions will involve using public transport except where it is necessary to use private transport to save time*

The public buses are cheap (the maximum one way fare is about 30 cents Australian) and are a fun way to see Jogja, but a local guide is needed to know the routes. Judging from the risks they're happy to take with other road users' lives, the bus drivers are psychopaths. I have a soft spot for crappy old vehicles, so I was in my element one afternoon when passengers became alarmed by what sounded like gun shots as a tyre lost its tread.

Private transport in Jogyakarta inevitably involves a motorcycle. Cruising around on the back of a bike is very adventurous because the traffic is chaotic—nobody obeys the road laws. I would

have thought borrowing a decent helmet wouldn't be too hard (i.e., a proper one with a functioning chin strap, not a kid's helmet or a pretend one) but good helmets are a rarity. The locals as often as not just don't bother to wear one. Where does their optimism come from?

[5] *tasks performed during the daily mission are to be reviewed on video in the class at the end of each day*

Video is a tough teacher. I used to regard my Indonesian accent as reasonable. No more. I see myself repeating time and again dumb mistakes like using *kapan* when I mean *ketika*¹. In a discussion with a farmer I suggest head injuries caused by falling tiles during last year's dreadful earthquake might've been avoided if the roofs of the houses were thatched as they are in some other parts of Indonesia—i.e., made of *rambut panjang*. I meant to say *rumpun panjang*. (i.e., thatched roofs with long hair?)

[6] *additional tasks during the daily mission might be forwarded by SMS texting on a mobile phone*

[7 & 8] *costs for public transport, tourist guides (if required) and lunch are to be paid for by the participant. Entry to tourist places and other costs associated with the daily task are paid for by the organiser*

The up-front fee for the course provides for most things and it represents amazingly good value. An Australian dollar goes many times further in Jogyakarta than it does in Bali. A light lunch on the street is about \$1 Australian.

[9 to 13] There followed the usual legal stuff about the organisers not being responsible for or liable for anything the participant might get up to, and that the participant is expected to behave with appropriate regard for Indonesian customs, laws and manners &c. including [12] *that participants would not drink alcohol during the day.*

I point out to Galang that it was my custom to have a beer with lunch when I am at home. He thinks for a moment and laughs, 'OK, let's drop that requirement!'

On Monday morning the course proper begins. I receive a sealed envelope with the words *Mission One* on it. Niko (the guide) and I are instructed to go to the village market. Today's tasks involve buying some vegetables and bits and pieces needed to cook *Sayur Jipang*, a Javanese recipe. I sit on a mat on the

1 *kapan* = when? *ketika* = when..., at the time that...

back verandah and Galang's mother shows me how to prepare the vegetables (they were new to me) and to grind the ingredients for sambal. Other daily tasks include visits to traditional cultural sites such as Borobudur and the kraton, and also various modern cultural sites such as cafés, night clubs, shopping plazas, computer game centres, warnets and so on. The Pandu team know I am interested in day-to-day activities of ordinary people so we also visit a motorcycle workshop, a bamboo weaving factory, and a classroom in a Muslim secondary technical school where I am invited to take a lesson in *Bahasa Ingggris*. A highlight for me is being invited to plough a water-sodden rice field with a bamboo implement pulled behind a graceful white cow. Fantastic! One village we visit, Imo Giri, is close to the centre of last year's earthquake in Bantul. I am interested in construction and home renovation so the rebuilding going on there is of great interest to me. I see coconut oil being prepared in a kitchen, and soy beans being processed in a shed (food in Java doesn't just mysteriously appear who-knows-how? and end up supermarket shelves). An engine block is being welded on the foot path, a man in a shed makes a hundred concrete bricks per day, and so on. These sorts of excursions are of genuine interest to me and consequently of great benefit to my language acquisition.

I suppose the one part of the program which I found to be merely satisfactory is the requirement to stay with a host family. This sort of thing always involves

the luck of the draw. While my host family were friendly enough, and were certainly attentive to my requirements, there just wasn't much interaction going on between us and this was supposed to be the purpose of my staying with them — 'a typical Javanese family'. To be fair, I was pretty flat at the end of each day's activities and frankly, I couldn't really be bothered with the effort of sensible conversation. Moreover, sharing the bathroom, breakfast and so forth, day after day is just tedious. In future I would appreciate the greater privacy of

staying in a hotel, or in losmen-type accommodation.

Several times in this article I say how exhausting I found the program to be. This is not in any way a criticism—on the contrary, I wouldn't have wanted it any other way. Galang and his team are all young and bright. Furthermore, Galang in particular has a high level of energy and is very ambitious for his student's language acquisition. Together with the AIA's Tata Survi, Galang has developed a most impressive language program and I feel very fortunate to have participated in it.



The author ploughing

February 14, 2007

Govt plans rice imports as prices rise

Urip Hudiono, *The Jakarta Post*, Jakarta
The government will import another 500,000 tons of rice to help keep prices from rising further after monsoonal flooding across the country disrupted the production and distribution of the nation's staple foodstuff.

The rice will be imported in March and April, Vice President Jusuf Kalla told reporters Tuesday after a meeting with economics ministers at the headquarters of the State Logistics Agency (Bulog). The Vice President said bids from suppliers had already been solicited.

'We need to secure the supply of rice to the market and distribute as much rice to the poor as is needed. That's why importing rice is reasonable in these circumstances,' he said.

The government imported 500,000 tons of rice in January, saying that it would

import more over the course of the year as required.

A total of 138,000 tons of imported rice will be delivered this month, Coordinating Minister for the Economy Boediono had earlier said, with another 350,000 tons arriving in March so as to buffer the country's rice stocks until such time as local production kicks in during the harvest.

The original decision to import rice came after prices rose to Rp 5,000 (55 U.S. cents) a kilogram in December and January, threatening a possible uptick in inflation.

The government then also instructed Bulog to supply the market with rice at a subsidized price of Rp 3,700 a kilogram.

Recent torrential rains have, however, disrupted rice production and distribution, prompting further increases in rice prices to more than Rp 5,000 a kilogram in some regions.

Crops on more than a quarter of the 135,115 hectares of farmland that were flooded have been completely destroyed, while many distribution routes — including

routes through the national capital, Jakarta, which was among the areas worst affected by the floods — were badly disrupted.

Agriculture Minister Anton Apriyantono had earlier said there could still be a rice shortfall of as much as 370,000 tons this month in the run-up to the harvest.

The government expects the harvest to be delayed until April because of the rains, and sees drought conditions later this year as being likely to affect production again as a result of the El Nino weather cycle.

Kalla said that Bulog would continue to supply the market with subsidized rice from its stocks, which would be augmented by the imported rice, so as to stabilize prices at some Rp 4,000 a kilogram.

Importing rice has always been a controversial issue for Indonesia, with the focus of the debate being whether to side with the country's consumers or rice farmers.

A recent World Bank report on poverty in Indonesia noted that rising rice prices had contributed to an increase in the number of people living in poverty.