



**KEY BUSINESS BOOK** — German economist Thomas Brandt presented the English edition of his book on Indonesian business culture to Minister of Education and Culture Wardiman Djajonegoro during a ceremony at the Regent Hotel in Jakarta yesterday. The book is entitled *Kunci Budaya: Business in Indonesia -- The Cultural Key to Success*.

## German economist tells all in book on Indonesia business culture

JAKARTA (IO) — The western mind's astonishing tendency to ignore realities outside its own realm is often matched in kind by its zeal to understand others people's cultures.

Among those blessed with the latter is certainly Thomas Brandt, an economist at the Jakarta-based German-Indonesian Chamber of Commerce (Ekonid), who launched *Kunci Budaya: Business in Indonesia - The Cultural Key to Success* on Thursday.

The publisher describes the book as "a manual on culture as well as hands-on advice for businessmen working in Indonesia". In truth, and in tribute to the writer, the hardcover book (124 pages, illustrated with photographs and caricatures) is more than that, as it covers just about everything one needs to be intellectually equipped with before doing business in Indonesia.

Remarkably, the book passes no judgement on the merits or demerits of Indonesia's business culture. It simply explains, often in a tongue-in-cheek manner, how and why things are done (or undone) here in a way that may not jibe with business practices in the West. Readers are invited to draw their own conclusions and to decide whether the country is worth putting their money into.

Let there be lingering doubts, Brandt is quick to point out that it would be virtually impossible for Indonesia to become a marketing man's bad dream. The country, warts and all, is "a hallmark of political stability and exceptionally dynamic economic growth." If that is not impressive enough, consider this

remark: "A middle class of some 40 million consumers which continues to grow at a rate of 10% a year, low labor costs and social overhead, and a market which is being steadily liberalized all await overseas investors."

Brandt has curiously - or perhaps deliberately - omitted any reference to corruption in all its manifestations (kickbacks, illegal levies et al), the military's ever-growing role in business and the unique business practices of the country's political elite. They are real issues and are elements that make up the backdrop against which business is conducted here. He is perhaps too nice a person to mention sensitive issues, an intellectual virtue that could undermine his otherwise sincere efforts to present a true picture of doing business in Indonesia.

What the book missed, it made up for thoroughness and breadth. The author is said to have interviewed 150 business executives from Indonesia and eight western countries before he sat down to write the book.

Curiously, or perhaps remarkably, Brandt took time to dwell on otherworldly items such as *dukuns* (shamans, or as Brandt sees it, "humans with great internal powers who, for better or for worse, are able to acquire supernatural forces"), *feng-shui* (Chinese geomancy), and *kebatinan* (defined as "Javanese mysticism, with its teachings of inner values"). He is perhaps suggesting that serious foreign businessmen have no business being here without a primer on the finest aspects of our culture. On a more mundane level, the book also makes references to *bapakism* (identified as an Indonesian manage-

ment style based on the paternal principle of the father-child relationship, Dharma Wanita (organization of wives of civil servants) and *malu* (shame).

In deference to Indonesian management nuances, ABS is mentioned, albeit in a fleeting manner. The author thoughtfully noted that the acronym has nothing to do with motor vehicles' state-of-the-art brake system, but rather with the office motto *Asal Bapak Senang* ("as long as the boss is happy").

Indeed, in the hands of an American publisher, the book would probably be subtitled "Everything you wanted to know about doing business in Indonesia, but were too lazy or disgusted to ask".

The German version of the book made its debut last year. Its popularity has probably encouraged Brandt to come up with an English version, which deserves to be included on the list of must-read books for foreign businessmen operating here.

Attesting to the book's credibility is the corporate sponsorship behind it. Dozens of reputable companies (BASF, Price Waterhouse, and Ericsson, to name but a few) from 11 countries have endorsed the publication of the book.

In a short panel discussion prior to the book's launching, one of the panel members remarked that, despite its many positive qualities, the book is unlikely to make Brandt very rich. But judging from the growing number of foreign businessmen coming here, and the urgency for them to grasp the twists and turns of Indonesia's business culture, that prediction may, in time, be proven wrong.