Cultural convergence is inevitable in the life of a changing society. The perceived tendency of conservative views and attitudes in local communities as well as religious groups and other social groups as a result of the counter to globalization and modernization has resulted in 'conflicting values' in the lives of people. Industrialization has given birth to a mass culture that leads to a collective spirit in the value system, technology has demanded the application of technical methods in all fields, and urbanization has led to the collapse of the communal values of a traditional society. This is where the importance of maintaining cultural integration in cultural life, which is not always easy to do in the midst of people's lives that are changing with euphoria or feelings of excessive joy with all freedoms.

This book tried to capture the inevitability of cultural convergence in the life of the changing society through portraying journey of humanity and human development at certain part of the world, which is Asia, and more specifically Indonesia. The writer interviewed numbers of individuals with various backgrounds from politicians, academics, social activists to religious figures. Some are celebrities, some are just ordinary people. Their work for humanity and human development is simply beyond compare. Not only that, the book also provides us with analysis through the writer's op-eds, which show the debate around educational policies and the work to improve education in this era of 4.0 industrial revolution and in post-pandemic era in Indonesia.

Above all, this book can serve as a reference to reflect on the efforts of selected inspiring people in improving human development and how several dimensions of culture, education and technology are interrelated with each other in the journey towards a betterment and advancement of society.

Prof. Dr. H. Haedar Nashir, M.Si., Chairman of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah.

The good teacher is generous, open, tolerant. He inspires hope. Learning is always possible. Alpha Amirrachman is that teacher. As fear evermore drips bitterness into the heart, this book conveys a sweet lesson.

Prof. Gerry van Klinken, University of Amsterdam.

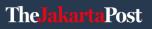
Anthropological approaches reveal invaluable insights 'behind the curtain'. The author combines his journalistic and academic skills to present us with intriguing and meaningful stories and analysis of societal development.

H.E. Drs. H. Hajriyanto Y. Thohari, M.A, Indonesia's Ambassador to Lebanese Republic.

The book gives us a unique perspective of how societies are changing due to tireless efforts of certain inspiring and visionary individuals. Asides from interesting features that he wrote, the writer also presents us with mind-blowing scrutiny of various imperative societal issues.

Prof. Dr. Azyumardi Azra, MA, CBE, Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta.





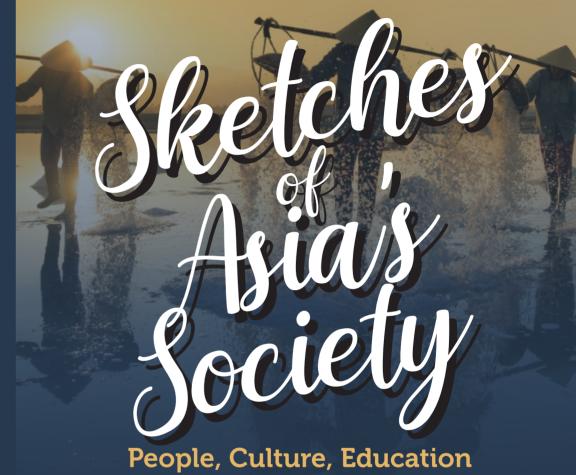




H. R. ALPHA AMIRRACHWAN, M.Phil., Ph.D.

Sketches of Asia's Society

SUARA MUHAMMADIYAH Metayari Tomu dae Amal H. R. ALPHA AMIRRACHMAN, M.Phil., Ph.D.



Foreword:
Prof. Dr. H. Haedar Nashir, M.Si.

and Technology

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Sketches Asias Society

People, Culture, Education and Technology

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H. R. ALPHA AMIRRACHMAN, M.Phil., Ph.D.



People, Culture, Education and Technology

Foreword: Prof. Dr. H. Haedar Nashir, M.Si.

SUARA MUHAMMADIYAH

SKECTHES OF ASIA'S SOCIETY

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Preface

his book is the result of seventeen years of personal and intellectual journey during which I was immersed myself in travelling to various places and meeting with lots of people. During this journey, I tried to capture the inescapability of cultural junction in the life of the ever-changing society through interpreting the deed of humanity and human development. I tried to reveal the unanticipated perceptions of the people that I met and conversed with. These people are simply amazing!

These people have worked tirelessly for the betterment of society, they deserve acknowledgement. Their aspiration might not have been fully realized, but as people read what they have been struggling, it is hoped that their effort would inspire other people who will continue their work and eventually realize their dream in promoting people's well-being and building more decent civilization.

I also explored places that I visited and tried to uncover things that might have not have been previously discussed thoroughly. People and places are inseparable, and there are always thought-provoking stories between the two. People's mobility might have been the answer of how values are so universal, of how we can find cultural similarity in different places with seemingly different people, because values are traveling, too!

However, I cannot just keep on travelling and meeting with people. At some junctures, I need to stop and reflect. This is the juncture where I need to spend time in thinking and putting this into op-eds. There are some analyses, although not so exhausting as this is not a pure academic work. I need to make sure that my concern is conveyed smoothly to wider public to be absorbed

easily, sometimes entertainingly to ensure it is unforgettable and lessons learned can be easily grasped.

I am grateful to The Jakarta Post for giving me golden and thrilling opportunities for so many years. I would not have been traveling to The Netherlands to pursue my Ph.D. if I had not had opportunities to interview my would-be research supervisor Prof. Henk Schulte Nordholt during his visit to Jakarta. I also owe a gratitude to Muhammadiyah, one of the oldest Indonesian Islamic organizations, for all the opportunities it has provided in widening my network and pursuing my personal and professional development with deep spirituality.

I would like to express my gratitude to Chairman of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. H. Haedar Nashir, M.Si. for writing an insightful foreword for the book, also Prof. Gerry van Klinken of the University of Amsterdam, H.E. Drs. H, Hajriyanto Y. Thohari, M.A., Indonesia's Ambassador to Lebanese Republic and Prof. Dr. Azyumardi Azra, M.A., C.B.E. from Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University for writing generous endorsement for the book.

Warmest gratitude is also presented to Aditya Pratama, S.S. from Suara Muhammadiyah, Nurhajati from Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisations Regional Open Learning Centre and Dwi Atmanta from The Jakarta Post who have given me full support to ensure that the book is published accordingly.

On a personal note, my deepest appreciation goes to my beloved family: my wife Peni Kusumawati, and my children Yasmin Azzahra Rahman, Baskoro Saputra Rahman and Seno Pamungkas Rahman who have provided me with abundant love. Last but not least, my whole-hearted gratitude is presented to my parents who have introduced me to the passion for reading and writing since I was a kid. •

Jakarta, December 8, 2021

Foreword

ultural convergence is inevitable in the life of a changing society. The perceived tendency of conservative views and attitudes in local communities as well as religious groups and other social groups as a result of the counter to globalization and modernization has resulted in "conflicting values" in the lives of people. The situation of the fading of the old values and the coming of the new values has provided uncertainty, thus giving birth to what William Ogburn called "cultural lag" or cultural gaps. In particular, material values such as orientation to money, wealth, and material things are much more developed than spiritual or spiritual values such as orientation to morals, science, art, and so on. Some quarters of society have lost the standard of values between right and wrong, good and bad, and appropriate and inappropriate, so they experience confusion in life or according to Alvin Toffler of what is called "disorientation", namely losing the direction of life.

In the context of culture, when social changes occur at a high speed, while structural and cultural changes are not in line, value anomie is born. Anomie occurs because of the gap between industrialization, technology, and urbanization on the one hand, and traditional cultural conservatism on the other. Industrialization has given birth to a mass culture that leads to a collective spirit in the value system, technology has demanded the application of technical methods in all fields, and urbanization has led to the collapse of the communal values of a traditional society. This is where the importance of maintaining cultural integration in cultural life, which is not always easy to do in the midst of people's lives that are changing with euphoria or feelings of excessive joy with all freedoms.

This book tried to capture the inevitability of cultural convergence in the life of the changing society through portraying journey of humanity and human development at certain part of the world, which is Asia, and more specifically Indonesia. The writer is a journalist-turned academic, who immersed himself in an intellectual adventure of both journalistic and academic work. The first and second part of the book show humanistic side of the people who devoted themselves for peace and advancement of society. As a journalist, the writer used anthropological approach to uncover unexpected insights of certain interviewed figures, events, and even places that he visited. Anthropology is known with its trademark of revealing the complexity of human interactivity and culture. In this case, humanist and social science strategies are adopted to "go beyond the curtain" to scrutinize aspects that might have been uncovered in human development.

When discussing about human development, we talk about the effort of widening people's access to chances to fulfil their rights and improve their welfare, in order to make them able to decide who to be, what to do, and how to live. In this book, the writer interviewed numbers of individuals with various backgrounds from politicians, academics, social activists to religious figures. Some are celebrities, some are just ordinary people. Long time experiences of these chosen figures were compressed into easyto-read pieces of writing. Their work for humanity and human development is simply beyond compare. And reading their stories remind us of our never-ending homework to promote people's well-being and build decent civilization.

One of the examples is Khalida Salimi, whose effort to promote women's right in Pakistan is elaborated with humanistic touch. She recalled the agony of one woman who was brutally tortured by her husband just because she was considered more successful in doing business than her husband. Another figure is Mariam Alimi who worked on humanitarian program to empower fellow Afghan women to help them escape from poverty and backwardness. She

said Indonesia can serve as a model of a moderate Muslim country with positive gender development. Another example is Bambang Basuki, an Indonesian man with visual impairment. During the interview with the writer, he recalled how his aspiration to become a student at teacher education institution was rejected simply because of his disability. His second effort to enroll at another teacher college was almost also rejected until one prominent figure stepped in to help him. He graduated with a high distinction.

The writer also interviewed international figures such as Anwar Ibrahim of Malaysia, Surin Pitsuwan of Thailand, APJ Abdul Kalam of India and more including Indonesian public figures such as the late former Indonesian foreign minister Ali Alatas, former minister of religious affairs and Muslim intellectual Quraish Shihab and dozens more, and revealed interesting, sometimes surprising aspects during his in-depth interviews with them. Also dozens of Indonesian social activists such as the late Utomo Dananjaya, George Junus Aditjondro, Siti Musdah Mulia, Jacklevyn Frits Manuputty, Hasbollah Toisuta, the late Moeslim Abdurrahman, Eva Kusuma Sundari, Syaifii Anwar, and more. Cultural events such as Dutch Cinemasia Film Festival and the launch of a book on the life history of Javanese -Surinamese were also eloquently reported during his stay in The Netherlands. The writer likewise included his two short stories, which shed the lights on humane aspects of the life of Indonesian ordinary people, and interview script from Australian TV show SBS Insight involving Indonesian public figures such as former Muhammadiyah Chairman Ahmad Syafii Maarif, Nahdlatul Ulama activist Yenny Wahid, former activist Hariman Siregar and others.

Not only that, the book also provides us with analysis through the writer's op-eds, which show the debate around educational policies and the work to improve education in this era of 4.0 industrial revolution and in post-pandemic era in Indonesia. The writer shows the other side of himself as an academic. Indeed, some of the educational debates were no longer issues nowadays, but still relevant when we consider them as lessons learned. For example, the tug of war between government and public over national examination and the benefits and pitfalls of the then-new curriculum. Lessons learned from these stories are the importance of public involvement in the formulation of public policies to ensure that the policies are acceptable and implementable.

With regard to the 4.0 era, the writer unveils the debate related to ethics and character building. It has to be understood that our previous society was *gemeinschaft* as a social group whose members were closely related to traditional dominant reasoning (traditional-based lifestyle), communal (emphasizing togetherness as a crowd), and affectual (prioritizing inner feelings or attitudes). To some degrees, this previous mode of society still would be maintained as the basis of a society that is grounded in its culture and environment. Many socio-cultural and moral-spiritual wisdoms can actually be preserved as well as actualized or transformed into the new era of virtual community eco-system. Of course, this cultural communality must be accompanied with the development of advanced, productive, scientific and technological attitudes to modern life, and other positive things to spur progress.

In his op-eds, the writer wrote about the role of Muhammadiyah, one of Indonesian oldest Muslim organizations. Nevertheless, I need to enrich his writing so that readers are able to grasp the values learned from the stories. More than a century ago K.H. Ahmad Dahlan pioneered educational reform as an institutional unit based on science and technology unity which has grown as a tradition of learning society based on spiritual wisdom in the form of *tabligh*, Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and schools as the realization of the *da'wah* (calling to embrace Islam) and *tajdid* (renewal). Muhammadiyah education is a modern Islamic education that integrates religion with life and between faith and holistic progress. From the womb of Islamic education, a generation of educated Muslims who have strong faith and personality were born, able to answer the challenges of the times.

This is a progressive Islamic education to enlighten the civilization of the universal human race.

In dealing with the recent socio-cultural challenges in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah's view can be referred to. In Muhammadiyah's view of "Advanced Indonesia" (Central Board of Muhammadiyah, 2015) in the socio-cultural field, the Indonesian nation still faces crucial problems that can threaten the integrity of the nation. Cultural issues are closely related to the nation's character, behavior, social life, values, and so on. Unfortunately, we saw the absence of a national cultural strategy as a reference for the design of Indonesia's future direction, which has several implications: (1) the fading of the spirit of nationalism and the fading of pride in the national culture; (2) the triumph of global culture in the contemporary Indonesian cultural scene today; (3) the erosion of noble values and the spirit of collectivity and mutual cooperation which is replaced by materialism, hedonism, pragmatism, and individualism.

Above all, this book can serve as a reference to reflect on the efforts of selected inspiring people in improving human development and how several dimensions of culture, education and technology are interrelated with each other in the journey towards a betterment and advancement of society. •

Yogyakarta, December 8, 2021

Prof. Dr. H. Haedar Nashir, M.Si. Chairman of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah

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PEOPLE AND GULTURE

Good Spokesperson, Not Information Minister

n his article, Information minister vital for Susilo's success (The Jakarta Post, Oct. 11, 2004), Muhammad Qodari argued that Megawati Soekarnoputri had failed to make use of the "strategic" information ministry. The appointment of Syamsul Mu'arif of the rival Golkar Party, not a cadre from her own party, as the information minister was also regarded as a blunder.

Qodari underlined the failure of Megawati to learn from the former president Soeharto who effectively used the information ministry to mobilize support although he was elected by the largely appointed members of the MPR (People's Consultative Assembly), not by the people.

Harmoko, the then-information minister and a Soeharto loyalist was regarded as an effective minister who successfully transmitted the message of the government's successes to the people, although Qodari admitted that Harmoko "was more a minister of propaganda than a communication minister."

Qodari said that we did not need such a powerful information ministry, yet he argued that the president-elect Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono should re-empower the information ministry by giving the ministry "wider authority and bigger budget than it had under Megawati."

I would argue that we do not need a strong information ministry and that Qodari's arguments are clearly disturbing.

First, linking the present socio-political situation to that under the Soeharto era is irrelevant. Under Soeharto, Indonesia was relatively stable not only because of his ability to control information, but also because of his massive economic achievements.

On one hand, the stability was also further shaped by his authoritarian rule where civil liberties were curtailed and the mass media was heavily controlled. This combination of economic achievements and authoritarianism appeared to have brought stability to the country.

However, after being hit by the 1997 crisis, people realized that something was wrong with the way the country was governed. It was unfortunate that the heavily controlled media appeared to have slowed people's awareness of the wrongdoings of the Soeharto-supported elite. If the media had been critical, the country would have taken earlier steps to overcome the crisis.

The post-Soeharto era marked the boom of the independent media, not only at a national but also at a local level. Media, such as television, has penetrated households even at the lowest level of society; the family. As a result, people have become more openly critical towards governments' policies.

People seemed to rely more on independent media, rather than on the state-controlled media.

Arguably, Megawati's defeat in the election was not significantly caused by her appointment of Syamsul Mu'arif as a communication and information minister and her failure to effectively make use of this ministry, but more by her own failure to intelligently make use of the independent media to articulate her message.

Her taciturn style and obvious impatience during tough interview sessions seems to have cost her reelection bid. Above all, she simply failed to convey the message of her government's macroeconomic achievements to people.

Second, fully re-empowering the information ministry—if it means reestablishing its apparatus down to the district and city level—would be a massive financial burden on the government.

Third, reestablishing the ministry of information could be a starting point of a rollback of the hard-won civil liberties during this transitional period. As "power tends to corrupt", Susilo's government could fall into the trap of gradually controlling the independent media, which is dangerous to our young democracy. In any democracy, press freedom is a must to ensure a multitude of views are aired and that no party dominates or abuses the media.

Therefore, having an increasingly powerful information ministry in Indonesia as a newly emerging democracy could be detrimental.

Fourth, as the reestablishment and re-empowerment of information ministry may well be unpopular, this could backfire against Susilo, especially if the minister of information, as Qodari suggested, should be picked from Susilo's inner circle or his own political party—the Democratic Party.

This could be a blunder and could politically cost Susilo and his new fledging political party, especially since during the campaign period Susilo had consistently declared his support for press freedom. It is therefore important that Susilo keep his promise to defend press freedom.

Fifth, the "how" rather than the "what" is more vital in regards with "information management." In this case, how information is managed, articulated, and transmitted is more important than the reestablishment of ministry of information. In fact, Susilo is far more eloquent a leader compared with Soeharto or Megawati.

Susilo is well-known for his skills in dealing with the independent media, proven during his time as a minister under the previous government. Susilo has demonstrated his impressive ability to tackle intricate questions not only from journalists, but also from the panel of experts during the presidential campaign period. He therefore does not need a ministry of information to act as a formal "public relations agent" as Qodari suggested.

Susilo as a president may not need to talk to the press as much anymore, but to help his job more effectively, he should have a professional "presidential spokesperson" to articulate his message and views to the people. The presidential spokesperson could

have a public relations team to ensure that messages about all the government's achievements are being articulated through the independent media.

Susilo's success and Megawati's failure in the presidential elections show how leaders have to be shrewdly articulate in dealing with the independent media. How to turn the independent media either to their own advantage or disadvantage entirely depends on the skills and knowledge of the leader and their public relations team. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, October 18, 2004

Social Responsibility, Harmony and Spirit of Humanity

■ he Dec. 26 tsunami disaster effectively flattened Banda Aceh and killed more than 105,000 people there. The tragedy was immense, and left people traumatized, trying to comprehend that they had lost their loved ones in an unpredictable, brutal way.

The world response to the disaster was impressively swift, although it remains to be seen whether this spirit will not recede as quickly as the tsunami.

Humanitarian assistance has poured in to the devastated city; and as flocks of national and international volunteers have gathered there in streams, the central government quickly implemented the visa-on-arrival in order to ease the relief operation. Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, which is still under a state of civil emergency, was suddenly open to almost everybody.

Much as the wrath of nature killed people irrespective of their nationality, ethnicity, race or religion, people around the world acted in like fashion, mourning the death of their fellow men and uniting in an awesome spirit of humanity. Social organizations around the world quickly organized fund-raisers, and it was astonishing to realize that those who acted first to lend hand to the most populated Muslim country in the world were from non-Muslim countries.

Within the country, heartening actions were also taken, such as Jusuf Wanandi's appeal in this paper not long ago that this was the moment of truth for Chinese-Indonesians to display their sense of solidarity by participating in relief efforts.

As such, the tragedy has prompted people across the world to gather in Aceh in a great spirit of empathy and compassion. The power of nature, at least for the moment, has sidelined man's arrogance, complacency and prejudice, instead uniting them in an unprecedented show of humanity.

Will this spirit prevail in the aftermath of the tragedy, particularly as reconstructing Aceh is a mammoth task that would take years to complete? Likewise, will we, as a people of this highly diverse country prone to communal and religious conflicts, be able to restrain ourselves from our historical biases, particularly toward foreign volunteers or to our countrymen of different religious and ethnic backgrounds?

Furthermore, in an era when terrorism has been so prominent, will the international community be able to put aside the prevailing prejudice that has identified terror with Islam?

Sadly, signs of racial and religious prejudice are beginning to emerge and may threaten reconstruction efforts.

As some volunteers admitted in this paper recently: "false stories about looting, burning and rape targeting the ethnic Chinese in Aceh ... and other rumors have been circulating via email and SMS. Some people responded ... by calling for a stop to all humanitarian aid from and to specific ethnic and religious groups".

Another sign was the circulation of leaflets that called on the Acehnese not to allow adoptions by "kafir (infidels), Christians or missionaries". Later, it was found that the flyers were spread allegedly to spark hatred among the people.

Meanwhile, a sense of "nationalism" apparently spread by ultra-nationalists began to emerge with suspicions that the foreign troops assigned to the city were more political than humanitarian—but President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono brushed aside the issue.

Likewise, at the international level, prejudice began to rise as various media reported that "militant groups" had joined relief efforts with a possible agenda to target foreigners from Christian countries. The concern may be understandable, but this merely proves that the flame of religious tension is still burning, regardless the severity of human tragedy—which is supposed to transcend race, faith and nationality.

It should be remembered that because the catastrophe was centered in our country, responsibility for the appropriate realization of aid efforts rests squarely on our shoulders.

In this case, it is the obvious duty of religious and local leaders to continue to foster an understanding within communities that this human tragedy belongs not only to "us", but also to "them", and that there is no reason whatsoever to stir misunderstanding. This message could be relayed through mosques, conscientious media coverage and the government.

In the meantime, foreign volunteers are also expected to conduct their relief mission with high respect toward local politics, cultures and religions. Perhaps cultural liaison officers should accompany volunteer teams to consult on local sensitivities. For example, religious conversion issues are highly sensitive and need to be handled with caution.

More importantly, all parties, particularly those who apparently tried to boost their political standing both overtly and covertly, should strongly restrain themselves. Spreading rabble-rousing rumors is not only cowardly, but is also dangerous to national cohesion. The tragedy is so vast and the agony and grief of the Acehnese so inconceivable, it is repugnant and unethical if certain parties try to gain political benefits at the expense of the suffering Acehnese.

The catastrophe is thus a test of our commitment to nurturing our sense of humanity and very possibly, this could serve as a historical turning point for this multi-ethnic country to embrace a more harmonious coexistence after prolonged religious and communal conflicts.

As we have all observed, the worldwide response in aid of our Acehnese brothers and sisters has been heartwarming and genuine. In return, we should show our sincerity, courage and a conscious attitude toward maintaining this spirit following the tragedy—and bury our misunderstandings, prejudices and selfishness. •

The Humanistic Character of Our Southern Neighbor

S a person lucky enough to win an Australian Development Scholarship, I had the privilege of not only developing my research skills and enhancing my academic standing at the oldest Australian university, but also to delve into the heart of the Australian way of life and gain an insight into Australian perspectives.

In the light of the historical visit by Indonesian president this month to Australia, I would like to reflect on my personal experience of how my three-year stay in the country deepened my understanding of our southern neighbor which is culturally, economically and politically so different from us.

The first event that shaped my perceptions was when I saw a group of Palestinian-Australian students demonstrating to protest Israeli attack on the late Yasser Arafat's headquarter just about 100 meters away from a group of Jewish-Australian students commemorating the Holocaust. No violence, not even verbal.

There was a great deal of tolerance! Many people showed respect and interest by talking to both sides. I could not imagine this happening in our county where anti-Semitism has become almost the flesh on our bones.

And when the Bali blast killed many Australians, I immediately extended my condolences to an officemate in the faculty, who immediately replied, "I feel so sorry for the Balinese who also lost their lives. It must be hard for their families." I could see obvious sadness on her face, but I did not see any anger, although she later told me that one of her friends was killed.

But that was in the academic world! How about outside the university? During one party, one of the girls I recently met could

not hide her anger and cynicism, "Bali is totally different from the rest of Indonesia. It doesn't actually belong to your country." I politely responded, "Even without Bali, our country is still so diverse, so what do you mean by the rest of Indonesia?" "The rest means the Muslim majority." I saw no point in arguing any more.

On one evening when we were in a bar in Newtown, some of my international friends verbally attacked me, "Your country must be a very dangerous place as there are so many Muslims there!" While I was only having a glass of an orange juice and the others were drinking beer, the comment was more than enough to make my blood boil. I said angrily that violence is "so normal" in Indonesia that a simple communal fight could result in headless bodies lying on the street. It was my Australian friend who calmed me down as he pulled me out of the bar before driving me home.

The Bali blast, in fact, profoundly shocked Australia, and people spontaneously responded by giving donation. They were greatly united in sorrow. Indeed, in a country where violence is so rare, the Bali blast was seen as an immense catastrophe. By contrast, in our country, where violence is almost the norm, the blast was perhaps regarded as "business as usual".

In general, I found that the Australians are more forgiving and humanistic in nature. The donations flowed not only to the Australian victims, but even more so to the Indonesians in Bali who suffered in the incident. The Australian government even built a hospital there as sign of appreciation to the Balinese.

Another example of this humanistic character was the public reaction after the Australian security forces broke down the door of an Indonesian Muslim family's house in Lakemba—an area of Sydney with a big Muslim population. The next morning the newspapers were filled with letters protesting the alleged harsh treatment that the suspected "terrorist" Muslim family had to endure.

They expressed great sympathy for the devout Muslim family. There were also news reports in which the reporters interviewed the family's neighbors, who defended them as a caring family that

could not possibly be involved in terrorism. Later, the authorities returned their confiscated possessions.

In Indonesia, however, the incident sparked huge protests. Browsing the internet, I found that there were almost everyday demonstrations protesting the alleged harsh treatment that the Indonesian family received.

However, no Indonesian news outlet reported anything about how the sections of the Australian public who responded sympathetically to the incident. In most of the Indonesian media, the overall picture portrayed was that the Australians were bent on a crusade for vengeance.

What made me feel ashamed, therefore, was our imprudent attitude and the fact that we seemed to forget that many Australians had lost their lives in a vicious way in the hand of terrorists who happened to be Indonesians. Yet, they were still able to display genuine sympathy for us. These humanistic and forgiving acts of many sections of Australian society should open our eyes when assessing the character of our southern neighbor. This was further evidenced when the tsunami devastated large swathes of Aceh. The reaction of the Australian public was unprecedented and their donations were the biggest in the world. What more evidence do we need?

However, we still need greater efforts to help our fellow countrymen truly comprehend and appreciate the character of our southern neighbor. While one cannot make generalizations, it is nevertheless a fact that exposing ourselves to their lives is an invaluable experience and helps us gain a clearer picture of the way in which Australians perceive us as their northern neighbor. I found that education is the best bridge that can facilitate this. Further educational collaboration, such as student exchange programs, will enhance genuine understanding between the people of our two countries. As John Howard once said, "We can change our friends, but not our neighbor." •

Australia-RI Ties Tested

gain, relations between Indonesia and its southern neighbor, Australia, have been tested, this time by the case of Schapelle Leigh Corby. This young former beautician was sentenced to 20 years in prison by the Denpasar District Court for smuggling 4.1 kilograms of marijuana into Bali.

The Australian public are outraged. Tim Lindsay, a professor of Asian law at the University of Melbourne, argues that the unprecedented frenzy of interest in Corby's fate doesn't mean that it has some legal logic to it. Many also have begun to worry that the level of hysteria on the part of the Australian public has reached a worrying level of xenophobia (The Australian, May 30, 2005).

Aside from the rights and wrongs of the case, there are some points worth considering.

First, it should be noted that excessive public and political pressure can be perceived as a "new-colonial agenda" by some sections in Indonesian society. The ultra-nationalists and religious zealots, for example, may be gratuitously provoked by this excessive Australian reaction to shoot their political bullets. A political spat between both Australian and Indonesian "xenophobists" is undesirable for all of us.

However, the Indonesian media have also played a role in unfairly pre-judging Corby, as some of them portrayed her as a "marijuana queen" before the verdict was handed down, which might be considered a breach of journalistic ethics in influencing the legal proceedings. This, too, might have ignited local sentiment against Corby.

Second, the "intervention" can also disturb Indonesia's struggle for the separation of powers. Australia has long been a

supporter of Indonesian legal reform, a perfect position that could fundamentally help heighten security and economic cooperation between the two countries, and greatly benefit Australia as well. It is therefore crucial that Indonesia's hard-won legal reform keeps progressing despite this case.

Third, one should try to observe the case through the lens of sensitivity. I recall in the aftermath of the Bali blast. After the broke down of the house of a suspected "terrorist" Muslim family in Sydney by the Australian authority, Indonesia witnessed a string of noisy daily demonstrations protesting against the alleged inhumane treatment the Indonesian family endured.

At that time, some Indonesian politicians both ultranationalists and religious fundamentalists enthusiastically joined the chorus of protests, apparently not necessarily to support the case, but to boost their political eminence and apply pressure on the government.

This should give us some understanding of how the Australian public would react if it were put in a "similar" situation. The palpable difference is: The highly emotive Australian public protest—despite the expected rise in anti-Indonesia sentiment—would unlikely be followed by a string of bomb attacks, unlike the cases in Indonesia, a place where violence and hostility have almost become the norm.

Fourth, such emotive feeling and political tension escalating from the case are an inevitable consequence of the two countries living so "closely" as neighbors. If we could become involved in a political row with Malaysia, a country with which Indonesia shares so much culturally and ethnically, what more Australia, which is so foreign both culturally and politically for most of us.

The case should therefore become an impetus for the two countries to continue to explore ways to foster understanding. I recall during my stay in Australia one professor at the University of New South Wales complained that the number of Australian students studying the Indonesian program had dropped significantly after

the East Timor case and the 1997 Asian economic crisis.

Another professor warns that the danger of this is that more and more Australians would never fully grasp their northern neighbor's character and the complexity of its society.

However, as the Chinese saying goes, "One hand cannot clap alone", the Indonesian side should also follow suit by opening more Australian studies programs in Indonesian universities. This all can be done with the support from government-to-government or university-to-university cooperation in exchanging the materials or lecturers needed. Indonesia has always been so inward looking, so it is timely for us now to strike a balance between an inward and outward looking attitude.

Lastly, the case proves that the close proximity between the two countries is not only geographical, but psychological as well, and there are still fissures of understanding that have not been filled.

So, is it possible for the people of the two countries to compassionately embrace each other? One may be skeptical, but the fact that some sections within the countries are attempting to put the case into the proper perspective shows that a sensible proportion of trust remains intact. Some Australian media have urged the public to respect Indonesia's legal integrity, as have the two governments.

It is therefore timely for the people of both countries, in the spirit of neighborhood, to use this latest case wisely not only for self-reflection, but also as a window of opportunity to reach into each other's deeper consciousness. •

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Short Story: The Price Of Life-Long Loyalty

lease work for us, Mbak. We would like you to take care of our children." That's what Syarif had said to her, oh-so many years ago.

Jami closed her eyes, biting her lips hard. Her tears had dried up, leaving behind loneliness to anguish her.

There should be no regret, as her fate had willed it to be this way. However, as she struggled to accept the fact that she was no longer of use, she still felt bitter, as poor as a church mouse. It was hard indeed, so reminiscing seemed to be the only thing she could do to kill the time as she waited for her final breath, which would come anyway, sooner or later.

Now she was a fragile old woman. All her hair had gone gray, her body had shrunk considerably until she was nearly a skeleton because of a series of illnesses, including a stroke. Although not a big one, it was more than enough to sap all the strength she had. While she still had her memory to at least recall some momentous events in her life, she was so physically weak that she lay virtually motionless on the small bed in her room, assisted by a young maid. It was ironic, she though, since she was herself a maid!

Syarif's two children were now grown up; they were no longer cute little spoiled kids. Nurafni, the eldest, just got married recently, so she no longer lived in the house. Rambe, the youngest, was in the final year of university. Studying law to pursue his ambition to become a lawyer, he had almost no free time—even for a short conversation with Jami. Awfully preoccupied with his university assignments, most of his time at home was spent knuckling down, typing with his eyebrows furrowed at his computer or reading books and reports, often until late at night. His spare time, he

spent chatting and chuckling with his girlfriend, when she came to visit and watch TV or have dinner together. Their loud bursts of laughter were often heard throughout the house. Well, at least he sometimes said, "Hi, Mbok" to Jami. Sometimes.

"I've been with them for two generations," Jami murmured to herself, her eyes staring at the gray ceiling. Yes, she had been the one who baby-sat Syarif, all the way from when he was a toddler to the adult he'd become.

Jami originally came from a small village in Ngawi, East Java. She was about to get married when a neighbor persuaded her to work for a newly married couple in Jakarta. She left her frustrated boyfriend, a peasant whom she had never loved, to take the chance.

And she loved the job—she loved the family and their blue-eyedson, Syarif. "A smart boy," Jami had whispered to herself, smiling.

But life had become difficult for the couple. The husband's career shattered into pieces when he was made a scapegoat during a legal battle between his company and another. He was thrown behind bars for four years. The worst hurt came when his wife asked for a divorce.

In fact, Jami had already smelled the rat—that Syarif's mother had double-crossed his father—but she was too scared or too uncertain about it that she never mentioned it to anybody. She was likewise afraid of interfering with the family's personal affairs.

Custody for Syarif was finally awarded to his father, perhaps as compensation for the betrayal of his mother, who ran off with another man after the forced agreement to a divorce. Worrying that losing his mother might psychologically disrupt Syarif's development, soon after his release from jail, his father married another woman in what it seemed a rush.

Jami steadfastly stood by the family, although her pay was stalled during this difficult time.

If Jami had not been there, Syarif would probably have suffered from an acute mental breakdown. It was Jami who, with infinite patience and care, put Syarif's broken heart back together and turned him into an intelligent and confident young man.

On the surface, Syarif's relationship with his stepmother seemed smooth, but Jami knew that there was no genuine love ever nurtured between them. It was Jami who showered Syarif with unconditional love, tenderness and attention. In almost every principle aspect of parenthood, she became Syarif's true mother.

Perhaps it was thus natural that young Syarif was conscientious where she was concerned, always worrying when Jami fell ill. Once, when she had fainted while Syarif's parents were at work, he immediately broke open his piggy bank and took Jami by becak, hugging her and sobbing, to a nearby community health center. "Mbak... I don't want you to die. Please wake up...," she had heard his tearful voice through her stupor.

Jami had never even finished elementary school, but she realized that education was immensely important and she pushed Syarif to study hard. Though she was unable to check his homework, Jami set a tough schedule for Syarif to study everyday.

The careful discipline turned out to be fruitful. Jami, along with Syarif's parents, attended Syarif's graduation ceremony when he achieved his Bachelor's at one of the most prestigious state universities in the country. She could not hold back her tears at Syarif gracefully receiving his degree in economics.

"He is my son, I wish."

And when Syarif won a scholarship to study in the U.S. for two years for a Master's, Jami recited the Holy Koran and woke up almost every night to say the tahajud, a highly rewarded evening prayer, for his safety and success.

Syarif had even introduced his fiancee to Jami first, not to his stepmother. It was Jami who gave the blessing for Syarif's marriage. Jami herself fell in love with the woman at first sight, whom she saw was a modest and intelligent young woman who possessed an indescribable inner beauty. And she knew Syarif had fallen head over heels in love with this woman.

So when Syarif had asked her to live with the newlyweds, Jami didn't think twice about accepting the offer—particularly as, after his father's death, Syarif's stepmother seemed to prefer living alone.

Syarif's career as a business consultant also skyrocketed; perhaps God had heard every tahajud Jami had said.

Jami burned her candle at both ends to raise Syarif's children. She fed them and took them to school. It was a tiring but rewarding time for her.

But with old age snapping at her heels, she felt increasingly weak. She suddenly realized that she was no longer as strong a woman as she used to be.

Besides, although the mother was busy with her career as a dentist, she was always able to manage to spend time with the children. At night, she read bedtime stories for the children, who would listen to her with their eyes bright. And when they were older, she regularly checked on their homework and was strict about teaching them how to recite the Koran and to pray. On the weekends, both parents spent virtually every single minute they had with the kids.

Jami felt increasingly useless when they hired two other maids to help her with the housework and to care for the kids. Worse still, she was confined to a hospital bed several times because of many complicated illnesses. Deep in her heart, her guilt and shame wracking her badly, because she had not only become futile, but she had also become an undue burden on the family.

Syarif and his wife were, nevertheless, patient with her and never had the slightest intention to release her.

"You are the well-spring of our strength. You must always be with us." This is what the couple—who visited her regularly in her room every other night—always said, aware of her bitterness.

Besides, she had nowhere else to go. All her sisters had died, and while she had other relatives, they had never made themselves known to her side of the family.

The children were well-mannered, although a bit distant, Jami always felt. They were not like their father, who was compassionate and attentive to her. Nurafni seemed smarter and more considerate than Rambe, but both had something in common: As soon as they grew up and became busy with their lives, they began to ignore Jami.

"They have a wonderful family with a perfect mother," Jami sighed, a deep sigh of mixed feelings. "They aren't to blame, I should instead be grateful that they were raised in such a loving family." Then she smiled proudly, a little arrogantly. "I was the one who blessed Syarif's marriage. They might not need me any longer, but I did the right thing."

She squeezed her eyes closed, trying to take a nap, but she never could. Her lunch, which had been prepared by the young maid and sat on the small corner table, was now cold.

The young maid, had tried to get Jami to eat her lunch, but to no avail, and she left the room in frustration as Jami continued to shake her head, her mouth pressed tightly shut.

-- Jakarta, June 27 2005.

Mbak-sister

becak-rickshaw

Mbok-mother

Short stories by the same author have been published previously in the 1980s, in the now defunct Senang magazine. •

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Conceicao Examines Turmoil of Modern Indonesia

Indonesia's Six Years of Living Dangerously: From Habibie through Gus Dur to Megawati, Will Yudhoyono Succeed? by J.F. Conceicao Horizon Books, Singapore, 2005 111 pp.

hile foreign observers of social and political issues in Indonesia usually hail from Western countries, *Indonesia's Six Years of Living Dangerously: From Habibie through Gus Dur to Megawati, Will Yudhoyono Succeed?* is distinct, as it is written by a former ambassador of one of the country's closest and most important neighbors, Singapore.

Joe Conceicao served in Indonesia and witnessed the social and political upheaval throughout successive presidencies, from Habibie to Megawati, and meticulously documents his personal observations in Indonesia's Six Years of Living Dangerously.

Conceicao gives detailed stories of how events unfolded in the succinct, 26 chapters of the book. The first chapter focuses on Habibie, whom he describes as a failed president with "too much IQ … and not enough EQ", for failing to control the powerful military.

In the ensuing chapters, the writer praises Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid for his liberalizing policy toward minority groups, while regretting his erratic style.

Megawati's uneasy relations with her vice president, Hamzah Haz, who was so preoccupied with canvassing his Islamic credentials, is also examined. And for current president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Conceicao borrows the Javanese maxim menang tanpa ngasorake—winning without celebrating—to depict Susilo's gentle attitude towards the obviously disgruntled, outgoing Megawati.

As for terrorism, Conceicao thoroughly examines the dilemma faced by the government in tackling this issue, such as a possible backlash from its large Islamic constituent. What is more intriguing is his assessment of the allegation made by some military generals who initially threw their support behind militia groups like Laskar Jihad and Front Pembela Islam (FPI), but soon distanced themselves from such groups as terrorism steadily fell under the international spotlight. Likewise, he attempts to connect the past role of former New Order information minister Ali Moertopo in breeding similar groups to counter communism to the present military's ugly habit of supporting militias.

Conceicao seems, if at all, to have little appreciation of the democratization process and instead, seems keen to parallel the Indonesian situation to that of the former Soviet Union, which collapsed due to its rapid march toward democracy. On the one hand, the writer is no doubt correct in warning that we might have become disillusioned with democratization, and that many are now longing for the New Order's style of stability.

This reviewer, nevertheless, cannot help but note Conceicao's pragmatic anxiety regarding the propensity of instability in a democratic Indonesia and sense an expectation that the country would once again become an effective stabilizer in the region, with or without democracy. Conceicao recalls that Indonesia was relatively more prosperous with a centralized system under the command of a single military figure; and this guarded expectation seems to be placed upon Susilo's presidency.

While something thought-provoking was expected in the chapter dealing with Indonesia-Singapore relations, virtually nothing new was presented.

Conceicao discusses thorny but important issues such as the extradition treaty, sand mining and the differences in Singapore's representation trade with Indonesia. Unfortunately, no concrete solutions are proposed, nor is bilateral trade analyzed comprehensively, with only two paragraphs devoted to the

subject - the remainder focuses on antiterrorism cooperation and Singapore's economic assistance.

Overall, the book effectively sums up the complexity of Indonesian politics: The "cultural shock" of key players in behaving painfully in a new but abrupt political freedom; the disturbed national cohesion exacerbated by ethnic and religious conflicts; and certainly, the acute and pervasive corrupt mentality within the ranks of the political elite.

Conceicao's vast knowledge of players in the military, religious, political and human rights sectors—even prominent figures of the past—is amazing, but is still not free from error. For example, Conceicao mistakenly writes that Hamzah Haz was formerly the head of Muhammadiyah, although Hamzah actually hails from Nahdlatul Ulama. To give the author credit, he admits that the book "comes not from any expert pen or that of scholarship."

In writing Indonesia's Six Years of Living Dangerously, Conceicao appears to have benefited greatly from the new trend toward openness and the free press that were thriving during the reformasi era, some things that are still a rare luxury in most ASEAN countries.

While the book consists of stories that are not so new for many informed members of select circles, it still speaks volumes of the importance of relations between the tiny yet prosperous Singapore and its giant but troubled and impoverished neighbor.

Indonesia's Six Years of Living Dangerously, in its perceptiveness, somehow reflects hope and expectation through the Singaporean lens for the path of change that Indonesia has chosen.

Soe Hok Gie: An Unshakable Idealist of His Time

uring his short-lived career as an intellectual, Soe Hok Gie (1942-1969) meticulously recorded the dramatic transition of this nation from Sukarno's regime to Soeharto's New Order.

Born the son of writer Soe Lie Piet, or Salam Sutrawan, Gie, both as a student activist and history lecturer at the Faculty of Letters, the University of Indonesia, wrote prolifically and published numerous critical articles in national newspapers, mostly on political and nation-building issues.

Zaman Peralihan (The transitional era) is a compilation of 41 articles written by Gie between 1967 and 1969, edited by Stanley and Aris Santoso and with a preface from prominent historian Dr. Kuntowijoyo.

Recently, the biopic Gie, directed by Riri Riza and produced



by Mira Lesmana, was released. This movie, while it helps us in envisaging his modest and heartrending short life, it is still inadequate in doing him justice without reading his real work.

What is most striking, perhaps, is his unmatched spirit of nationalism, his blunt rebellion against injustice and corruption—which alone was enough to earn him enemies—and although he was an Indonesian of Chinese descent,

he refused to change his Chinese name into an Indonesian one. His brother Soe Hok Djien changed his to Arief Budiman.

From the outset, it is obvious that Soe struggled to position himself beyond all ideologies, an untainted intellectual who would "bark" at anybody he considered either politically or morally corrupt, or both.

He read numerous books, including those by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels; nevertheless, he was against the way the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) allegedly exploited the poor for political gains that would benefit the party's elite.

During the volatile period when Sukarno campaigned rigorously to impose Nasakom-a "forced" marriage among nationalism, religion and communism-the sentiment between the army and communists was ever more fractious. Disgusted with Sukarno's increasingly erratic style of ruling the country, Gie, along with many other students, became involved in demonstrations to demand a change in regime.

But this marked the beginning of the long-term bloody honeymoon between members of the University of Indonesia and the military. This shows how shrewd Soeharto was in taming the most strategic section of society: the intellectuals.

In this, Gie became deeply disillusioned with many of his friends who had been so easily lured by the new establishment. Gie decided instead to become a university lecturer and to continue to reflect upon his encounters with the bitter political reality through his writing.

In "Di Sekitar Pembunuhan Besar-besaran di Pulau Bali" (About the large-scale massacre on Bali Island), he was the first to blow the whistle on the massacre, which claimed around 80,000 lives on the paradise isle. He said that the mass killing was not purely communist cleansing, as it was also a case of "saving ourselves first", as those who had been staunchly pro-Nasakom or nationalism, religion and communism—were now those who were campaigning to kill the "communists".

Gie could not hide his shock realizing the atrocious brutality

which followed the purge of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). In "Surat Bebas PKI" (A letter certifying non-association with the PKI), he deplored the excessive policy of the New Order regime that created an undue PKI-phobia, as even young children needed to have an official letter proving they were "free of communist elements".

He also began to feel uncomfortable, as he had been part of the moral force that had pushed for the birth of the New Order.

Indeed, as Dr. Kuntowijoyo writes in the preface, while Gie might have died too young for history to judge his enduring idealism thoroughly (his accidental death was caused by inhaling poisonous gas during a climb on Mt. Mahameru), compared with his peers, Gie was indisputably one who adhered strictly to his principles.

Credit should go to editors Stanley and Aris Santoso, whose efforts makes it possible for us to reflect that if Gie were still alive today, he would have—for the second time—seen a student movement become gravely fragmented and many, though not all, once prominent student activists trade in their precious idealism for short-term cooperative positions.

Equally important, Zaman Peralihan also celebrates a recognition that a spirit of nationalism can burn so brightly in the mind and deeds of a young Chinese-Indonesian, a member of an ethnic minority group that often suffered from discriminatory treatment under the New Order. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, August 14, 2005

What Indonesians Think of Australia

The following is a transcript of an episode of Insight titled "Neighbours", recorded in Jakarta and broadcast October 4,2005 on SBS TV Australia. Taken from Insight Transcripts:

I or some time Insight has been planning to produce a special edition of Insight from the Indonesian capital, Jakarta. We've had plenty to say about Indonesia but we wanted to know what Indonesians think about us. Insight planned to talk about Australia's foreign policies, Muslim extremism and the trials of young Australians on drug charges in Bali. A poll had shown nearly a third of Australians view Indonesia as a threat, a country where 90% of the population is Muslim. Insight planned the program to coincide with next week's anniversary of the terrorist attack in Bali in October 2002. Tragically, another massacre in Bali has now occurred. Insight recorded this program before the events of the weekend but what our guests have to say is still entirely relevant. Our forum was held at the studios of Metro TV in Jakarta. Insight invited community leaders, politicians, diplomats and journalists, many of whom have visited Australia. Our guests included Yenny Wahid, the daughter of the former Indonesian president - she once worked as a journalist for the 'Sydney Morning Herald' - also Desi Anwar, the senior newsreader for Metro TV where we recorded our program, Wimar Witoelar, a former presidential advisor and a well-known commentator and Angelina Sondakh, a former Miss Indonesia and a Member of Parliament.

JENNY BROCKIE: I'd like to welcome all of you to Insight tonight. Thank you very much for joining us. And I'd like to start with you, Alpha Amirrachman. You've just come back to Indonesia,

I think, after studying at the University of Sydney. What do you think Australians don't understand about Indonesia?

ALPHA AMIRRACHMAN, JOURNALIST: Thank you, Jenny. But I don't want to get trapped in stereotyping, OK? But I was in Sydney when the Bali blast occurred. It was so tragic. Many Australians were killed. And people at the university were very diplomatic. They didn't want to show their anger to me, their cynicism. But, outside of the universities, I met one woman who was unable to hide her anger and she told me, "Bali should not belong to Indonesia." I said, "Why?" "Because Bali is so different from the rest of Indonesia." "What do you mean by 'the rest of Indonesia'?" "The rest of Indonesia means Muslim majority." So I don't want to get trapped in stereotyping, but I have strong -

JENNY BROCKIE: But do you think that stereotyping exists in Australia?

ALPHA AMIRRACHMAN: Yeah, yeah, I think so. But I had a strong impression that, that woman doesn't really understand the diversity of Indonesia, doesn't really understand the complexity of Indonesian society. That's my impression.

JENNY BROCKIE: And you - I know you also wrote about another incident in a bar, when you were in a bar in Sydney. Can you tell us that story?

ALPHA AMIRRACHMAN: Yeah, but I was with my Australian friends and some of my international friends verbally attacked me, they said, "Your country is so dangerous because most of them are Muslims." And I was so angry. And my Australian friend calmed me down and then he drove me home. But I didn't get drunk. I was drinking orange juice at the time. Those people were drinking beer and they were angry with me.

JENNY BROCKIE: But how did you feel, though, when you received that sort of message in Australia? How did you feel at that time? You were angry, yeah?

ALPHA AMIRRACHMAN: I was so angry and I said, "You know, a small fight in Indonesia could result in headless body on

the streets." I was so angry, I expressed myself like that. And my Australian friend calmed me down and, yeah.

JENNY BROCKIE: Desi, what do you think? You're a news anchor here at Metro TV where we're recording this program. Do you think Australians understand Indonesia?

DESI ANWAR, TV PRESENTER: Well, I wouldn't want to presume what Australians think of Indonesia. I mean, the - the one thing that we do get is through the media coverage of what -Australian media cover, what Australians think about Indonesia. And I don't know how true that is, whether it actually reflects the sentiment of Australians in general.

JENNY BROCKIE: So what do you think of that media coverage, though, when you see it? What sort of things are you talking about?

DESI ANWAR: Well, for example, the reaction to the Schapelle Corby case, for example, and of course the trial of Abu Bakar Bashir and that kind of emotions that we get to read on Australian media. And again, being in the media, I don't know how -

JENNY BROCKIE: Representative it is.

DESI ANWAR: How true, how representative that is. I mean, my personal experience with Australians, I mean, they're wonderful people. I know a lot of people in Australia and I know a lot of Australians in Indonesia.

JENNY BROCKIE: But what it is about that kind of coverage that worries you?

DESI ANWAR: Well, I think it doesn't worry me as much as - for example, it shows in a way that there is this gap of understanding about Indonesia but what actually worries me most is that the emotional reaction that that kind of - you know - generates a kind of ill feeling, which I think is unnecessary. Because, I mean, emotional responses I can perfectly understand because, you know, with emotional reactions, you can motivate people to do, sort of, good things, you know? It makes people generous for example. It makes people - it puts people together.

But, in terms of emotional responses that create, for example, negative impact, I don't think it's very good -

JENNY BROCKIE: You mentioned a gap in understanding. Where's the gap?

DESI ANWAR: Well, I think basically - I mean, I wrote an article about the reaction to the Schapelle Corby case. One thing that I think Indonesians cannot understand is why was there such an emotional response from the Australians because, when Indonesian media, for example, covers issues about Australia, for example, the Bali bombing, we actually covered the - more of the victims, you know, the Australian victims of the bombings more than the Indonesians who actually died. So to get that kind of response is -

JENNY BROCKIE: So you think it's skewed the wrong way in a sense? It's sort of tipped the wrong way?

DESI ANWAR: Yeah, and I think it's, you know, I think that kind of reporting, I mean, if the media wants to focus on that kind of reporting, they're not actually doing themselves a service by focusing on the emotional side of the reactions.

JENNY BROCKIE: Yes, Wimar, yes.

PROFESSOR WIMAR WITOELAR, JOURNALIST: I don't think we can single outthe Australian media as such but the media of any developed country which has an organised press backed by big business. I'm a Professor of Journalism at Deakin University and I've seen how people are channeled into the world of PR, world of journalism, and I know the individuals well, I know very many Australians. All of them are unbiased. All of them are enlightened. All of them are educated. But, when they band together, they have a posse mentality that says, "Lynch the image of the Indonesians." So I think it's a frenzy among the media, which is not specifically Australian.

JENNY BROCKIE: But I'm interested about the point you're making about when people get together they're - you said bossy?

WIMAR WITOELAR: Posse. American, P-O-S-S-E. You know, "Get the culprit, round up the citizens, get the black guy, the Chinese guy, the brown guy."

JENNY BROCKIE: Racist? WIMAR WITOELAR: Yes.

JENNY BROCKIE: You think the Australian media is racist? WIMAR WITOELAR: No, they're not racist, but the Australian media appeals to some part of Australia which somehow, you know, gets their feelings incited over that. But you don't see that when they are individuals.

JENNY BROCKIE: Yenny. Yes. Do you agree with that? I mean, you've worked as a journalist on the 'Sydney Morning Herald' and you've lived in Australia.

YENNY WAHID, DIRECTOR, WAHID INSTITUTE: To a certain degree, there is a stereotyping that journalists do to make the stories simple for the readers. And I think Indonesia is such a complex and diverse culture that, without the simplification and stereotyping, it would be very difficult for the, you know, the readers or for the - What do you call it? For TV. For the viewers, the audiences to understand what's really going on. So it's almost-

ANGELINA SONDAKH, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT: I just want to jump in. You know, the perception, you know, because when I was meeting with the Member of the Parliament from Australia and some of the young members of the Parliament and they say, "Angelina, are you Indonesian?" and it's like, "Yes. Why?" "You don't look like Indonesian." I mean, that's one perception. But I'm purelyIndonesian. My mum is Mindanaoese and my father is Indonesian. Thisis how the Australians see Indonesia and the Indonesian people. I mean, besides that, you know, people from Aceh, Minadano, Jakarta are different.

JENNY BROCKIE: So do you feel Indonesia gets simplified as a nation? Lots of nodding here.

YENNY WAHID: Any news in the world about other countries always gets simplified. It's just the nature of the media, in my opinion. And also, in my - I think that most people are very provincial, be it Indonesians, Australians, Americans, you know, any countries. I mean, they tend to look at things from their own

perspective. So the media, in a way, has to follow that dictate, you know, otherwise, people won't really understand the story. So, in that process, the nuances get lost.

JENNY BROCKIE: And what are the nuances? Tell me about the nuances of Indonesia.

YENNY WAHID: Well, you know, the fact that -

MAN: Tell her about the Muslims being seen as troublemakers.

YENNY WAHID: Yes, the Muslim issue, you know, is very, is very simple case. I mean, Muslim in the world, not only Indonesia, is not a homogeneous entity. We have a spectrum, you know, a difference, of a brand of Islamism that people believe in. There are the so-called moderates, there are the people that believe that violence is the only means to channel their views and all sorts of things but not all Muslims are similar. And this gets lost of course in the translation or whatever, in the reporting.

JENNY BROCKIE: Chusnul, what do you think about that? Did you agree with that?

CHUSNUL MAR'IYAH, UNIVERSITY LECTURER: Well, I'm not expert on the media but I think my understanding about Australia and Indonesia relations is, you know, Australian society is also divided between the Canberra policies and the Jakarta policies and also between the people.

JENNY BROCKIE: Dita, yes?

DITA SARI, TRADE UNION LEADER: Yeah, I think we have to be quite clear in this case because we have to make sure that there is a differentiation between the Government of Australia and the people of Australia. We cannot just mix it up. Most of the time, I think the policy of the Government of Australia, the Howard Government right now, can shape the attitude and consciousness of the majority of the people of Australia. For instance, like the participation of the Howard Government in the war in Iraq, the Australians also accepting troops to Iraq, it helps creating the understanding and consciousness among the Australians that because this war is against terrorism and it - most of the time, it's

portrayed as the war against the Muslims' community - so the sentiment, anti-Muslim sentiment, then raised in Australia but I think it's not originally owned by the Australians but I think it mostly caused by the policy of the Government.

JENNY BROCKIE: And Indonesians feel that? You feel that, that anti-Muslim sentiment? Is that something you feel coming from Australia?

WIMAR WITOELAR: Well, even in your opening you said that Australians thinking that Indonesia 90% Muslim means they are trouble. So it goes, you know, even without thinking that the stereotypes - I know, that if you think hard, you know - I mean, these are not terrorists you have here and we are probably 90% Muslim - but somehow again, when you get on to that podium, into that thing called the media, you tend to generalise, maybe because it's harder to differentiate.

JENNY BROCKIE: But that is a fact too. I mean, that's just a fact.

WIMAR WITOELAR: That 90% are terrorists?

JENNY BROCKIE: Yeah, yeah - no. That's not what I said. That's not what I said!

WIMAR WITOELAR: What is a fact? **JENNY BROCKIE:** That 90% are Muslim.

WIMAR WITOELAR: Sure. But that has no linearity with trouble making. I mean, in New Orleans, there was a lot of looting, they're not Muslims. Bush dropped a lot of bombs in Iraq, Afghanistan and he's not Muslim. So a lot of non-Muslims cause trouble - Northern Ireland, everywhere.

JENNY BROCKIE: I guess it's interesting because, when I think about the reason that we said that, one of the reasons we said that was because of the fear. It feeds on itself, doesn't it, in a sense?

WIMAR WITOELAR: Well, fear, of course, is psychological. It's your problem. I mean, Australians ask me, "Is it safe in Indonesia?" I don't know. It's not safe anywhere. It's not safe at my dentist, right? I mean, you can get AIDS or something. So it's very psychological.

JENNY BROCKIE: It's a good point. It's a very good point. Yes.

THANG NGUYEN, JOURNALIST: I'd like to go back to what Wimar and Yenny and other media leaders here have said so far about the gap between the understanding of Indonesia in Australia and vice versa. It's not just how the media portrays Indonesia in Australia and the rest of the world - what they portray, what they choose to show of Indonesia really matters. You sit in Canberra or Washington DC and you turn on your camera - your TV, I'm sorry - all you see is coverage of terrorist bombings. You don't see much of diverse Indonesia. You don't see coverage of the third largest democracy in the largest Muslim world on TV.

JENNY BROCKIE: But that's the nature of news, isn't it? Isn't news about problems?

THANG NGUYEN: Bad news sells. Bad news sells. Intelligent people will think for themselves, they will not rely on the TV to tell them what to think but unfortunately how many Australians or Americans for that matter... ..have that capacity to distinguish what is bad news from good news.

JENNY BROCKIE: Yes. Mr Sadjanan, yes, you. Former ambassador to Australia. What do you have to say about this?

SADJANAN PARNOHADININGRAT, FORMER AMBASSADOR TO AUSTRALIA: Well, being somebody who really has to gather all the opinion and try to articulate these opinions into strengthening relations between countries - that is my profession - I think when people oversimplify, simplify overly a certain issue, and react on this very simple mind of opinion, of reason, then that creates problems to people like us. Say, for instance, at the time when you remember probably in 2001 when hundreds of illegal migrants, they was transported by Indonesian ship. The reaction that is being made by the Australian Government at the time was that the Indonesian Government have to be held responsible for this. And then this, I think it is oversimplification of a response by somebody at the very high level of government official. I think this

kind of attitude in many cases creates difficulty for people like us.

IENNY BROCKIE: Do you feel that's patronising sometimes? SADJANAN PARNOHADININGRAT: Oh, well, unfortunately that's the fact. So saying that the Indonesian Government have to be held responsible for this case - I think this for the ordinary people in Indonesia is kind of accusations, baseless accusations. Because those people are not even Indonesian nationals and we do not know where they come from but why should we be held accountable for this while the fact is that those people are trying to get into Australia and we are the victim of the situations. Being the victim at the time when we feel we are the victim and at the time we are feeling as the victim, we are accused as being irresponsible and then it's hard for people like us to, you know, to redress the situations.

JENNY BROCKIE: Mmm. Hermawan, you wanted to say something. Now, you're a marketing consultant here. I'm interested from a marketing point of view what you think about all of this.

HERMAWAN KARTAJAYA, MARKETING CONSULTANT: Yeah, OK, in marketing, we believe that it is very often that perception is much more important than reality. But, you know, it is not fair actually. Sorry -Australia with 16 million to 20 million population, they are called continent and Indonesia with 220 million population, we are archipelago with 17,000 islands in the low tide and maybe 15,000 islands in the high tide, but we are called only country. So there is a simplification about us, right? So maybe Australians, they have the perception that Indonesia is very simple because we are called 'country' so everywhere is the same, that's why they simplify the thing.

JENNY BROCKIE: Endi, you wanted to say something. Editor of the 'Jakarta Post'. What do you think?

ENDI BAYUNI, EDITOR, JAKARTA POST: I feel this is turning into bashing the Australian media or it sounds like it. But I think that Hermawan was right that perception is formed by the media and in that way I think the media is responsible for forming public opinions. You know, trying to play the devil's advocate, I think thereverse is also true - that Indonesian media is not helping to, is not giving a true picture of Australia nowadays. Australia is now a very multiethnic society but yet I think in the public's perception, Australia is still very much white man's country, you know, European traditions, values and prejudices and this is the way in which we see - I'm not talking about us here because we know better - but the public in general, they see Australia -

JENNY BROCKIE: You're saying it cuts both ways.

ENDI BAYUNI: Especially in the wake of 9/11, the Bali bombing, the war on terrorism, and Indonesians see Australia as, you know, very much a white man's nation with all its, you know, so-called hidden agenda.

DESI ANWAR: Sorry, Jenny, if I can go back to the poll that you mentioned and if this poll is pretty accurate and if most Australians think that Indonesia is full of extremist terrorists about to blow up Australians and that, you know, Bali should be part of Australia and not part of Indonesia, then I think it's really sadin a way because, I mean, if the polling is accurate -

JENNY BROCKIE: It's a small poll. It's a small poll.

DESI ANWAR: If that is true, then I think Australians are missing out on, you know - just Indonesia is so much bigger than Bali, it's so much more. There's so many things that they can actually - you know, if they like surfing, it's not just in Bali, you can go to Nias, you can go to Mentawai and you can go to Banda. And so, in away, I think it's the Australian media, you know, they are - I want to go back to the media. The media is actually doing the Australians a disservice because focusing on or basically pandering to sort of emotional outbursts, for example, or just focusing on the hopefully the vocal minorities that are sort of out to bash Indonesia is actually not doing Australians themselves any good because they are projecting themselves in a negative way, not just to Indonesia, but to the rest of the world. And I think it's a pity.

JENNY BROCKIE: Well, for many Australians, one of the

strongest images to come out of your country recently was of Schapelle Corby, that Schapelle Corby drug trial, the woman who was convicted on drug charges and there've also been others since, other Australians, the Bali Nine, now facing possible death sentences, and Australian model Michelle Leslie, who is now also facing drug charges. Alpha, what do you think of the way Australia has reacted to those drug cases?

ALPHA AMIRRACHMAN: Corby?

JENNY BROCKIE: All of them, but Corby in particular, because it was the strongest.

ALPHA AMIRRACHMAN: Yeah, I think it's - I could say excessive. I think, um, it was overreaction and it was also, again, situated by the media. And in Corby's case, you know, it was so excessive. It was focusing only on that and then emphasising the difference between Abu Bakar Bashir's treatment and Corby's treatment. That is legal matters, legal matters.

JENNY BROCKIE: And you think that was OK? I mean, Australians did think that was an extraordinary difference between the sentence that Abu Bakar Bashir got and that Schapelle Corby got. You did not think that was unusual?

WIMAR WITOELAR: They're apples and oranges. You cannot compare them. First of all, as a parent, I would be greatly distressed if my daughter, if I had a daughter, be in a spot like that and it's a personal tragedy. You should not link that, I think, to a case of bilateral relations or a judgment of the Indonesian judicial system but, if you do so, you should compare the Corby case to other people involved in drugs.

SADJANAN PARNOHADININGRAT: Can I pick up your point? I tend to see that this is a matter of law enforcement that is being judged by emotions, a matter of implementations of law that is being judged by the perceptions of somebody who is young and innocent and things and that this influenced the articulations of the very strong judgment into our judicial system as if we did not do anything good in terms of implementing our own law. This is,

I think, once again, oversimplification of things, of matters. That placing an issue of law enforcement in the context of defending somebody who is young, innocent, pretty and things like that and then is being cooked up by the media and this is gone wrong. Once again, this is a matter of implementations of law enforcement.

JENNY BROCKIE: There was some extreme reaction in Australia to the Schapelle Corby case in particular and especially on talkback radio in Australia. I'd like to play you something that was broadcast on a popular Sydney radio station in May this year about that case.

MALCOLM T ELLIOTT, 2GB: The judges don't even speak English, mate, they're straight out of the trees if you excuse my expression.

CALLER: Don't you think that disrespects the whole of our neighbouring nation?

MALCOLM: I have total disrespect for our neighbouring nation my friend. Total disrespect. And then we get this joke of a trial, and it's nothing more than a joke. An absolute joke the way they sit there. And they do look like the three wise monkeys, I'll say it. They don't speak English, they read books, they don't listen to her. They show us absolutely no respect those judges.

JENNY BROCKIE: Angelina, you wanted to say something. ANGELINA SONDAKH: Yes. This is actually what we have talked about in the young leaders' discussion - you know, me and Nursanita - about how the media comparing our judges to the monkey and that it comes to our sensitivities. I mean, I believe that it's not the majority of the people in Australia think or voice but, in a matter of this case, I think media plays an important role in making the relationship to the betterment, not to damage the relationship to more worse.

JENNY BROCKIE: I should point out a lot of Australians were very offended by that as well when it was broadcast. Thang, you described in an online column, I think, about this case, you described the Australian reaction as being 'xenophobic'.

THANG NGUYEN: Yeah, right. And it reflects a certain attitude of racism which still remains in Australian society today. I think it's one thing to portray - for the media to pick on this image of a true-blue, beautiful woman to gain the sympathy from the Australian public, that's one thing. But I think it's beyond that, it's beyond the media playing that beautiful-woman-true-blue card. What I looked at in that article was why is it that there are 54 Australian criminals who face drug charges, including death penalty - death, not 20 years - why don't they get the same - why didn't they get the same attention from the public as well as the Australian Government that Corby did? For your information, she wrote a letter to Prime Minister Howard, who responded that, "Rest assured that I will take a personal interest in your case." Right?

JENNY BROCKIE: So why aren't the others getting attention? Why don'tyou think the others are getting any attention?

THANG NGUYEN: Because, guess what? Their last names are like mine -N-G-U-Y-E-N-, T-R-A-N, L-E-E, not Schapelle, not Corby.

JENNY BROCKIE: Do other people agree with what Thang is saying?

WIMAR WITOELAR: Well, the burden is on disproving his impression because it's a fact that so many dozens of Australians are facing death penalty and severe penalties in other South-East Asian cities and they are not of European origin so there has to be, you know, something disproved.

JENNY BROCKIE: So do you think Australia is racist?

DESI ANWAR: Jenny, if we read the articles in the newspapers, if we watch the programs or if we listen to that kind of radio broadcast, of course then we will think that Australians don't like us, they're racist and basically, you know, they don't like to be neighbours with us. But how true is that in real life? I mean, because we mustn't fall into that trap of stereotyping like all Australians are like that. Like you said, a lot of Australians were

offended by statements that came out of that interview. So, I mean, let's be areful here -

JENNY BROCKIE: Not to generalise too much.

DESI ANWAR: Not to generalise or throwing petrol into the fire

THANG NGUYEN: Don't get me wrong. I did not say in the article that the whole Australian society is racist. I'm saying through the reaction from the Australian public and the support from the Government, there is a reflection of certain racist attitudes that still maintain or remain in the society. I'm not saying the rest of Australia is racist, alright?

DESI ANWAR: No, but that kind of news coverage, or that kind of attitude will portray Australia as racist.

THANG NGUYEN: Excuse me. Have you heard of a former minister by thename Arthur Calwell? And you know what he said? "Two Wongs don'tmake a white." Here is a minister who said that.

DESI ANWAR: Well, I think that's more of a reflection on theminister.

THANG NGUYEN: Have you heard of a magazine called the 'Bulletin' in Australia? Only a few dozen years ago, the masthead of it still said "Australia for the white man". Now, if that is not racism, thentell me what it is.

JENNY BROCKIE: So that still bites for people in Indonesia? **DITA SARI:** The policy, the immigrant policy of the Australian Government. I went to Australia in the year of 2002 and we had a picket line in front of the Villawood Detention Centre. It's animmigrant detention centre. And we saw that they were being treatedvery badly, children and mothers and old people. They're coming from Vietnam, they're coming from Bangladesh. They are poor people. They're not white. They're brown, they're yellow, but they're notwhite. And I saw how many of the Aborigines, for instance, in Australia are also very poor and how the policy of the Government treating them. I think this kind of public policy made by the Government affects the people, affects how the people look

at the non-white Australians or the non-white people who live in Australia. So I don't say that Australians are racist, but the policy -

THANG NGUYEN: Sure, that's the reason why they see Corby as an innocent victim and they don't see other Australian citizens of Asian or Latin American descent as innocent. Maybe, maybe. We don't know, alright? They are saying the Indonesian judges are not being fair, the legal system here sucks. Now, let me tell you, the Indonesian judges gave Corby a very fair go. First, there was not enough witnesses. The High Court of Bali then decided to give her a second chance to bring witnesses to Bali to testify in her defence. Guess who showed up? One Indonesian law professor who defended her. Where were the Australian witnesses? If that's not fair, what is? You tell me that the first trial was unfair. I give you another one. Prove it.

CHUSNUL MAR'IYAH: Jenny?

JENNY BROCKIE: Yes.

CHUSNUL MAR'IYAH: I think we have to go back again. There are some differences between the people-to-people relations because I know there's still a lot of Australians that have, like, empathy to Indonesia, they love Indonesia, they teach Indonesian language there. So going back again to item of racism, I don't want Indonesia also to become racist to Australia but again we don't know much alsoabout the Australian society. You know, we don't have lot of, like, Indonesian people who study in Australia, they don't study Australian, they study Indonesian, something like that. But in Australia we have so many Indonesianists there that learn aboutIndonesia. But at the same time I think we have to portray the wholeof the issue on the table and we have to discuss. For example, the policy of the Government in Canberra. They have good intention tohelp eastern Indonesia for the development. They give lot of aidsthere. But if there is no communication between Canberra and Jakarta, what happens? The good intention of Australia, we don't receive as good intention. This is the idea that Australia wouldlike to disintegrate Indonesia. So there is a

lot of thing from the policy point of view coming from Jakarta, Canberra and also the people to people. And I think also because I'm teaching Australian in the University of Indonesia, I feel so sad when Australian Government close their library in Jakarta, in Indonesian Embassy. You want Indonesia to understand about Australia but there is no access to information about Australia in Jakarta. So it's the whole lot of things that we have to learn each other.

JENNY BROCKIE: And I know we have a lot of students here in your yellow uniforms from the University of Indonesia and you all study Australia, don't you? You all study Australian politics, yeah? Whatare you learning about our country?

STUDENT: Desert. Large continent. Empty. 19 million people living there.

STUDENT 2: About the kind of state, about the political system in Australia, about the habits of Australians and a lot of more we study about Australia. But we have no access to know Australia morebecause the reason that the library in the embassy is closed since the Bali bombing.

STUDENT 3: The first impression I get from Australia is Australia isan arrogant country. Why? Because they try to bully Asia Pacificregion.

JENNY BROCKIE: They try to bully Asian Pacific nations?

STUDENT 3: They claim themself as a representative of a Western country in the Asia Pacific. So there is two policies of Howard I think is so arrogant. The first - he claims himself as the deputy sheriff of United States in 1999 and, in 2002, he...he made a policy about the pre-emptive strike as a legal right to self-defence.

PRIME MINISTER JOHN HOWARD, "SUNDAY" 2002: I mean, it stands to reason that if you believed that somebody was going to launch anattack against your country - either of the conventional kind or of the terrorist kind - and you had the capacity to stop it, and therewas no alternative other than to use that capacity, then of course you would have to use it.

JENNY BROCKIE: So that had a big impact on you? That comment about apre-emptive strike had a big impact on you? And others here? Yes?

WIMAR WITOELAR: Yeah, of course. We were scared stiff, yeah.

JENNY BROCKIE: You are scared stiff?

WIMAR WITOELAR: Yeah. Because we could get struck any moment just because somebody is suspicious. It's just like the guy on the Londonsubway who got shot because he was carrying a rucksack.

IENNY BROCKIE: Well, those -

MAN: The Australian support of the Iraq war also counts as adefining -

JENNY BROCKIE: Well, let's get on to that. We'll get on to that in aminute. Because the pre-emptive strike issue is an interesting oneand this issue of extremism comes up again and again. And the other very strong images, I think, that have had a big effect on Australians in recent times have been of the Bali bombings where 88 Australians lost their lives three years ago as well as obviously very many Indonesians and the Australian Embassy bombing here inJakarta just a year ago. Do you understand Australia's fears ofextremism? Can you understand that fear?

WIMAR WITOELAR: We are just as afraid of those extremists as Australians are. I wrote an article. I said, "When your dog hasfleas, don't think that the dog is enjoying those fleas." Don'tthink we like having terrorists. We are scared stiff. We've had todeal with them since I was 10 years old, which means 50 years agofor your information. We've always been bothered by terrorism and we can not get rid of them. So we know what terror is, we know what fearis and we hate them, we despise them. The Muslim majority is againstterrorism. And to be thought of that we are comfortable with theselies, these fleas, these terrorists - I feel sympathy for the Australian people because they are good people, they're kind people, educated, but how come some of them are just so simplistic?

JENNY BROCKIE: Yenny, you were nodding your head then. YENNY WAHID: Yeah. Like Wimar just said - Wimar put it succinctly -but we are as fearful of the threat of terrorism here in our own backyards as any other countries, I guess. And the fact that, like Dita said, us being a victim but also seen as being the aggressor really puts us off, you know? You know, instead of giving us anyhelp in dealing with terrorism, we're getting all this flak abouthaving them here. I mean, we don't choose to have these people here. They're just, they're here.

JENNY BROCKIE: Nursanita, is it a legitimate fear to have, do you think?

NURSANITA NASUTION, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT:

Yes, you are afraid about the terrorism and I think that all the people in the world areagainst that. But I am very sad if terrorism is tied to the Muslims. You know, this is not true because, you know, in Indonesia, weare...most of us are Muslims but we are moderates. But I think that Islam is not the same is terrorism. If there is terrorism, I think that's because they act as the result of the international policy -maybe international policy to the Muslims so they don't like that sothey act like that. But my party, the Prosperity and Justice Party, sometimes we act and make demonstrations and demonstration I thinkis part of the democracy. So I think that - I heard that this evening that the Prime Minister of the Australia said he wants revisions about the regulation of terrorism. I hope that Australianot be panic and change the regulations and don't obey about the human rights and also the democracy.

WIMAR WITOELAR: Sorry, sorry, my son asked me specifically to saythis to the forum. Yesterday we went to this book store, a great big book store, I won't say the name. Now, it's almost fasting time so there's a big section of Muslim books. About 50% to 60% of the Muslim books all had a theme of how to fight terror, how to curtailterror, we are against terror. So the Muslim community is fighting very hard against terrorism. Yenny's institute, the Wahid Institute, also is doing that. So we are doing our best but it's an

uphillbattle. It's no help if we are accused of helping the terrorists.

JENNY BROCKIE: Yeah and it's interesting too because I mean Islamicextremists may be a minority but when they speak out they certainlyhave a big impact. And I'd like you to have a look at this reportfrom SBS in Australia recently which includes an interview with one of the men who was convicted of the Australian Embassy bombing in Jakarta. Have a look at this.

SBS NEWSREEL: Amidst the gangsters, corruptors and drug dealers, the terrorismtrials attract very little interest. Iwan Darmawan, alias Rois, issaid to be the one who selected the suicide bomber for the embassyattack.

REPORTER, (Translation): I read that you said that you regret therewere no Australian victims.

ROIS, (Translation): That's not what I regret, I regret that thevictims were Muslim and Indonesian. That's what I regret.

REPORTER, (Translation): But as I asked, do you hate Australians?

ROIS, (Translation): I don't hate Australians. I hate people any where who oppress Islamic people. I don't hate Australians, but anyone who oppresses Muslims.

JENNY BROCKIE: Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif, what do you think of thoseviews when you see those views?

AHMAD SYAFI'I MA'ARIF, MUSLIM LEADER: I think if we talk about terrorisms, we have to make a clear distinction. There are at least three types of terrorism - individual, groups and state-structured terrorism. I think what Mr Bush and also Israel have made is some kind of state terrorism. Therefore -

JENNY BROCKIE: Do you understand those views? I mean, do you support those views?

AHMAD SYAFI'I MA'ARIF: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. I think, if youtalk about terror, we are on the same boat - we have to hunt the terrorists, all kind of terrorism, to the end of the journey. So I have made a very strong statement about this many times terrorism is the real enemy of humanity.

DESI ANWAR: Jenny, the man behind the bars is not representative of Muslims. He is a criminal. That's why he's behind bars. For the rest of us, when the Bali bombing happened, when the Australian Embassy bombing happened, when 9/11 happened, we were devastated, we were very, very - I mean, the whole thing was very, very tragic and we were extremely sorry and more so because of it happening to our guests, you know, these are the guests of Indonesia. And if it happens, say for example - we've seen so many tragedies in Indonesia, so many conflicts, so many bombings that they hardly make headlines any more but when it happened to the Australians in Baliand also the attempt at the Embassy, we in the media made it very sure that we showed our sympathy and we were extremely sorry. And that's all in sincerity because we are as disgusted, you know, when we see violence, when we see murders, when we see senseless killings. I mean, we are just as terrified of terrorism as anybody else.

JENNY BROCKIE: Do you think Muslim leaders in Indonesia have been strong enough in their condemnation of those acts of violence? Syafi'i, yes.

AHMAD SYAFI'I MA'ARIF: This is the problem. OK, we have made very strong statement many times to condemn strongly all kinds of terrorism.

JENNY BROCKIE: You don't hear a lot of that in Australia.

CHUSNUL MAR'IYAH: Because the media is never interested in the moderate people. They just like to have the radical, very few unspoken. That's the problem, the problem I think is why.

DITA SARI: Why the perception is built that way? Why the opinion is built that way by the media and also by the authority? I think because the foreign policy, the Australian foreign policy needs somegood ground...

JENNY BROCKIE: Just let her finish.

DITA SARI: ..needs some strong justification so that the kind offoreign policy that is chosen by Howard, by the authority of the Australians, is justified by the people. So they -

JENNY BROCKIE: Are you talking about Iraq and Afghanistan? What areyou talking about?

DITA SARI: Foreign policy. And also local policy. So this kind ofperception is built so the Australian people can be convinced thatwe need less immigrants, we need more troops sending to Iraq, weneed more military budget so that more troops will be sending toIraq.

JENNY BROCKIE: Very quickly. We are going to have to wrap up.

DR HARIMAN SIREGAR, FORMER PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR: You Australian gotused to Suharto. When Suharto here, Australian is very polite to Indonesia because Suharto is strong. And you need people like thatin Indonesia now. It's impossible.

JENNY BROCKIE: Ah. You need Suharto now?

DR HARIMAN SIREGAR: No, no, no. What you expect - like what you said.

JENNY BROCKIE: We need Suharto?

DR HARIMAN SIREGAR: You expect condemnation, strong condemnation. You need Suharto. We haven't got Suharto anymore.

JENNY BROCKIE: A diplomat here. Yes, A diplomat's voice.

SADJANAN PARNOHADININGRAT: Let's pick up a few points being made by my colleague, Dita. I think she pointed out very rightly in saying that the foreign policy that is being made by the AustralianGovernment should be formulated in such a way that it's alsosensitive to its neighbours, like us, like Indonesia, for instance. It's not only for the purpose of satisfying their constituents, that government like Prime Minister Howard that have to say something -

JENNY BROCKIE: And you don't think it is? You don't think that policy is formulated that way?

SADJANAN PARNOHADININGRAT: Well, rather than considering therelations between the two countries, I think they consider givingmore emphasis on how to satisfy their constituents and -

JENNY BROCKIE: Harry, you have to stop. You have to stop! Just let him finish.

SADJANAN PARNOHADININGRAT: But I have seen so far, within this last few years, I thought there had been an improvement in the relations between the two countries, at least in the government-to-governmentlevel. And where in almost every issues that cropped up in the context of relations between the countries being communicated behindthe bar, behind the scene, rather than being said, as we qualify it, as megaphone diplomacy.

DR HARIMAN SIREGAR: I remember in Suharto times - Let me speak. The intelligence of Australia always coming down with our boat. There is our fishermen always come to Australia but they never take action. They just put some intelligence there, they take a note. But now, they just burn our boats!

JENNY BROCKIE: Woah! Woah! Woah!

SADJANAN PARNOHADININGRAT: Something about future relations between us and them.

JENNY BROCKIE: I'd like to wrap up on that note. Reni, you teach Australian politics and I'm interested in knowing what you think could be done to improve the situation.

RENI SUWARSO, UNIVERSITY LECTURER: Yeah, good question. First, Iwant to give a comment. I want to be more fair, you know. I agree with all the previous speakers about terrorism. Islam against terrorism, yes. But we should fair to express that all religionsright now tend to be more militant - it is also for Islam and alsoother religions. It is the first point. And the second point is Iwant to raise issue, the basic issue whether - we are talking aboutstereotyping, about Australian perceive Indonesia, and how aboutIndonesia perceive Australia? How many people in Indonesia realisethat we have neighbour, Australia is our neighbour. We didn't talkabout the extremists, no, no. We just realise whether - do werealise that Australia is our neighbour? How many people? Is it upto 50% of the Indonesian people? I don't think so.

JENNY BROCKIE: OK, so there's not an awareness of

that. How can weimprove the understanding between the two countries?

WIMAR WITOELAR: More people-to-people contact. When you have people-to-people contact, it's all right. I lived in Geelong for three months, never an unfriendly face. I travel in Melbourne, friendly. Never. I get my nasty moments on radio talkback shows and I get myuncomfortable moments in shows like this but, if you have people-to-people contact, everything's peachy. Australians are great.

JENNY BROCKIE: Final comment, yes.

ALPHA AMIRRACHMAN: We should have more opportunity. This is to showhow we Indonesians do not really understand Australians. We might ask like, "Are you Westerner from the east or easterner from the West?" That expresses that we actually don't really know Australiansand we need as Wimar said, people-to-people contact.

DESI ANWAR: Sorry, Jenny, to answer your question, maybe you should have more Australian journalists here in Indonesia. I mean, the fact that Australia is so close, you have so few journalists and mostlyif they come here it's because of a particular trial. You know, Indonesia is so huge. There's so many stories to cover and I think Australians, the Australian public is missing out on a lot of great stories. And, trust me, Bali is not the only place for Australians to go on holiday to. You know? So I think it is important for moreinformed programs about Indonesia. Likewise, I mean, we should have more kind of exchanges, people-to-people. But definitely, I think the media does play a huge role and if the Australian media is only interested in focusing on sensationalist stories and in generating audience or readers' response by printing out emotional and sensationalism story, I think, you know, it's doing a great disservice to the Australian public that is now portrayed as, Iwouldn't say arrogant, but simply sort of, in a way, well... .. unsophisticated, I'm sorry to say, with all the kind of, you know, emotional outbursts we're seeing. It's, you know, quite embarrassing.

JENNY BROCKIE: It's a very interesting note to end on. We do have to end, I'm sorry. We are going to have to finish because we are out oftime. I would like to thank you all very much for joining me tonight. It's been really interesting to hear your views here inJakarta. Thank you very, very much for being here. And that is Insight for this special edition from Jakarta. •

Taken from Insight Transcripts SBS Insight 05 October 2005.

Volunteer Group Supports Acehnese to Embrace Future

he first time when the team from Al-Azhar Community Development in Aceh (ACDA) surveyed the catastrophe in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, the members were deeply disturbed by the palpable feeling of disorientation emanating from many of the survivors.

However, they were further surprised with the fact that many children there were still able to demonstrate enthusiasm and spirit, particularly when they came together in a group and played.

As reconstruction progresses, many who lost their children and families are now looking determinedly to the future, with some experts predicting a baby-boom in the region.

This spirit is indeed an invaluable capital for them to rebuild their life and bury their wounds.

It is because of this that ACDA—a volunteer based organization founded by alumni of Al-Azhar Mosque's youth organization in Jakarta—has followed an approach of transformational relations, which is designed to restore and nurture intrinsic capacity of the community to identify their own problems, to manage their resources and to communicate solutions that would enable them to comprehend their present and future lives realistically.

The ACDA program places the civil capacity-building efforts ahead of infrastructure establishment in disrupted areas by adopting a transformation process called Community Driven Development (CDD). Accordingly, the expected goal is for the affected community to develop the confidence and ability necessary to recognize problems, suggest solutions and plan their own future, along with any physical deployment, such as social

and economical infrastructure proposed by working institutions in their surroundings.

A cultural approach has also been adopted, and under this approach, the ACDA uses mosques as its base, considering that the staunchly Islamic province employs a certain degree of shari'a in its law.

Mosques are used not only as a center of worship, but also a center of cultural, social and economic development.

The ACDA accompanies and assists the community in responding to government policy in rebuilding their devastated province. The main tools used in this are focus group discussions and participatory methodology, which motivates women and men from all strata of life to raise development issues and evaluate the impact on them, generate information based on their own personal experiences and broach issues of concern that demand collective efforts both through education and advocacy.

For the first year-program, from July 2005 to June 2006, the ACDA is focusing on community service and community relations, which is to be followed by long term community empowerment program. The organization is focusing initially on Nagan Raya district to develop model of participatory development.

This short term program is being pursued through reconstructing and activating local social and cultural infrastructure, such as physical restoration of meunasa—small mosques—mosques, and schools and libraries for children and students; facilitating kindergarten and primary school education through assistance in formal and informal education for children in cooperation with local governments, non-government organizations (NGOs) and awarding educational scholarships; donating emergency aids; and organizing small groups of local people to guarantee the sustainability of the programs.

Long term programs focus on community empowering, which is aimed at nurturing societies that are well organized and possess the capacity to systematically solve their problems. Activities

towards this end include conducting social and economic studies that can be used to help refugees in entering reconstruction phase of Aceh as is outlined in the National Development Planning Board's blueprint; providing technical assistance to local residents to run small-and-medium scale businesses, such as in drawing up proposals, business planning and business organization; and in facilitating aid distribution offered by other NGOs or individuals that particularly target economic and educational rehabilitation.

In appreciation from the locals for this long-term project, the ACDA has been granted a two-hectare plot of land, which will be followed soon by another plot six hectares for the purpose of building schools.

Many challenges still remain, with survivors bearing the psychological scars of the devastating disaster, as ACDA program director Chaidir Amin said: "We often find that the children sob at night, surely remembering of how their beloved parents were tragically swept away by the tsunami. And some of the adults still find it hard to forget the cheerful faces of their dead children. To tackle this problem, our volunteers try to build deeper personal relationships with those affected individuals, by becoming their close companions and persuading them to busy themselves with positive activities."

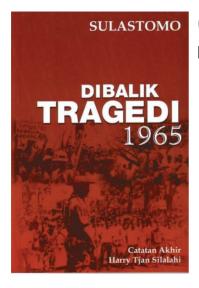
Another pressing challenge is, he said, "how to convince the Acehnese that, although they have been victimized by Jakarta for too long, we non-Acehnese do embrace our brothers and sister in Aceh with sincere heart."

The contributor is a lecturer at the Faculty of Education, Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa State University, and volunteers as an educational consultant for the ACDA. •

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Sulastomo's Accountability To 1965 Tragedy

Di Balik Tragedi 1965 (Behind the 1965 Tragedy) Yayasan Pustaka Umat. Januari 2006. 179 pp.



personal account of the 1965 aborted coup in his book Di Balik Tragedi 1965 (Behind the 1965 Tragedy). As a chairman of the Indonesian Muslim Association (HMI) from 1963 to 1966, Sulastomo not only observed the transition of power from Sukarno to Soeharto, but was directly involved in the power game at a time when young Indonesia was bitterly sandwiched between two competing ideologies: communism and capitalism.

The HMI survived amid intense pressure from the PKI to disband the Muslim students' organization. Sulastomo's humble personality and his sharp mind in assessing the situation helped the organization build strategic rapport with the Army as the emerging political force.

Now Sulastomo, a physician whose clean record has never been tainted by the New Order's corrupt practices, is speaking up to challenge the theories surrounding the tragedy. He divides his red-covered book into six analyses. Analysis one, the coup was the result of internal friction within the military, particularly the Army; analysis two, it was orchestrated by Soeharto against Sukarno's leadership; analysis three, it was engineered by Sukarno; analysis four, it was a conspiracy between DN Aidit/Sukarno and Mao Ze Dong; analysis five, the CIA fueled the conflict; and lastly it was the PKI that masterminded the coup.

The first analysis he considers unacceptable because it was the Army itself that was targeted by the PKI. Indeed, there were internal rifts and the kidnappers of the generals killed were Army personnel. However, he considered the kidnappers as mere puppets who exerted little influence on others.

The second analysis is also thrown out by the writer because Soeharto was very loyal to Sukarno and was not ready to accept more authority. Soeharto's attitude reflected a Javanese saying mikul nduwur mendem jero (highlight one's good deeds and bury his bad deeds). After the 1965 aborted coup, however, people's demand for regime changes intensified.

The third analysis is also not plausible because Sukarno himself was bewildered in the morning of Oct. 1, 1965 after the kidnapping of the generals. Having received the report from Brig. Gen. Supardjo one of the leftist military personnel-Sukarno denounced the kidnappings. Sukarno himself was very cautious regarding the issue of the Dewan Jenderal (The Council of Generals).

The fourth analysis purports that because Sukarno's health had deteriorated there was an agreement between DN Aidit, Mao Ze Dong of China, and Sukarno that the latter "take a rest" in Swan Lake, China. Sulastomo refuted this, as it was implausible that the founding father would agree to leave behind his people in such a critical situation. Kruschev of the USSR once offered Sukarno the opportunity to "take a rest" as a government guest during the struggle to reoccupy Irian Jaya, but he refused.

The fifth analysis is also refuted. It is true that CIA intelligence officers might have played role in Indonesian politics, but credible documents show that Western countries were surprised over the

"premature" coup by the PKI, which was more likely inspired by political developments in Peking (now Beijing).

The sixth analysis suggests that it was the PKI who masterminded the coup. There are several arguments purported. The PKI was strongly inspired by Peking which was at that time spreading its power throughout Asia. The "progressive" political party was also anxious that Sukarno's health was deteriorating and was concerned that if it did not seize control through a coup, the Dewan Jenderal would do so first. He added that although not all members of the Central Committee of the PKI were aware of the coup, such as Nyoto, the system within the party dictates that the PKI as an organization should bear all responsibility.

Based on his recollections and interviews with other players, including former president Soeharto and Hardoyo, the former chairman of the left-wing Concentration of Indonesian Student Movement (CGMI, a student organization affiliated with the PKI), Sulastomo defends the sixth analysis. His defense is also supported by Harry Tjan Silalahi, a former activist of the Indonesian Catholic Students Association (PMKRI), who helped campaign for the elimination of the PKI. Harry Tjan has contributed his thoughts in Sulastomo's book.

Nonetheless, during the launching of the book at Jakarta Hilton Hotel on Jan. 25, which was marked by a "PKI bashing" poetry reading by a prominent poet Taufik Ismail, the book drew criticism from Sukmawati Soekarnoputri, the daughter of Sukarno, who was among the audience. She argued that the coup was a result of bitter friction and rivalry within the Army, particularly between Soeharto and Ahmad Yani. The latter was murdered during the coup.

Understandably, the Di Balik Tragedi 1965 did not attempt to discuss how millions of ex-PKI members, sympathizers and their families were killed, tortured or discriminated against following the coup or how Sukarno was in fact was put under house arrest until his death.

Indeed, when a nation painfully reflects on past wounds, it is

always advantageous to hear directly from the people involved, whatever perspectives they might hold. As noted historian Anhar Gonggong said during the book launching, the writing of history never finishes. Equally important is what human rights campaigner Salahudin Wahid said that truthful reconciliation is what this nation badly needs to heal its wounds. Jakarta Feb. 1, 2006. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, February 26, 2006

Freeport And the Crisis of Multinational Companies

ocal miners, armed with bows and arrows, clashed with security guards, soldiers and police after they sifted through PT Freeport Indonesia's tailings in Papua (The Jakarta Post, Feb. 27, 2006). It is not unusual for a multinational company operating in a developing country to be embroiled in conflict over environmental degradation. While 77 percent of U.S. companies—many of them have grown into multinational ones—have a formal system in place to proactively identify key environmental issues, the attack on Freeport in Papua certainly reveals a sad story.

Freeport arrived in Indonesia in 1967, before the government under Soeharto formulated the foreign joint-investment law, enabling the U.S. gold and copper mining company to hold a wholly-owned subsidiary. The company has amassed incredible wealth from its operation. It has been accused of polluting Otomona River, by constantly dumping crude copper tailings into Ajika River. Environmental groups have revealed that around 420 square kilometers of the area surrounding the company has been environmentally damaged.

From an organizational point of view, the clash between local Papuans and the mining giant should be regarded as the failure of a modern organization to deal humanely with marginalized people. Due to the incident, the discourse on the concept of a postmodern organization has come to the fore as it has failed to achieve its initial noble objective of leading human beings to a more humane, advanced and civilized society. However, the notion of postmodern organization itself is not unproblematic.

While postmodern organization is often seen as an antithesis of

modern organization which is believed to be more environmentally friendly and flexible, with continuous education and empowerment and greater participation of marginalized groups within and outside the organization, there has not been a fixed definition of postmodernism. Likewise, postmodernism hypercritical of modernism and its insistence on abandoning the latter has been criticized, too, as Schmidt (1994) asserts that "modernism is a continuum and it must be reflected, cannot be abandoned."

Despite its perceived greater flexibility and noble objectives, there is still doubt that the "less authoritative" postmodern organization could have a concrete and effective agenda to impose an education that could empower individuals and to deal with the issues of the minority. The attempt of the defenders of postmodern organization to revoke authority is debatable, as it is unthinkable that an organization can effectively operate without having authority. Perhaps, what an organization needs is a more humane, sensitive, flexible and accountable type of authority exercised by democratic leadership. What is clear is that the emergence of postmodern organization has given a fresh catalyst to conduct a critical evaluation of modern multinational companies.

So how do we see postmodern organizations? There seems to be two schools of thought here. First is to regard this as a totally different form of organization that views itself as an antithesis of the classical modern organization. Second, is to look at this phenomenon as a continuous and gradual process of evolution of a contemporary organization into something more humane. Therefore a middle path is sought for compromise.

Equally important, this discourse on postmodern organization should be seen as a reflection of the success and failure of the modern organization in the ongoing quest toward the betterment of any organization. So can this quest help multinational companies to sensitively and comprehensively deal with the issues of local people? It is clear that the continuous transfer of knowledge, honest dialog, just and transparent empowerment programs, and

tangible mutual collaboration between multinational companies such as Freeport and indigenous people within and outside the organization in inevitable.

Multinational companies should show their moral determination to ultimately return most of their privileges to the local people who are now still incapable due to the lack of knowledge, know-how and technology. Otherwise, local people would be increasingly marginalized, the environment would further deteriorate, and multinational companies would grow into a serious threat to civilization.

The Freeport row would not have occurred without the complicity of the elite groups of the country, both civilian and military, who have long benefited from the exploitation of Papua's natural resources. They too should abandon their personal greed, put pressure on Freeport and generate the maximum benefit for the development of the local people. •

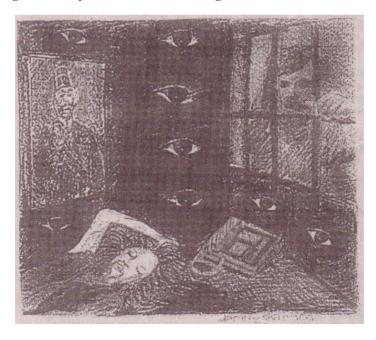
First published by The Jakarta Post, March 9, 2006

Short Story: The Night the Phone Rang

Ihe telephone rang piercingly, breaking the long silence. But Siska Anggraini did not move an inch. It was the middle of a drizzling night; the heavy rain had just let up.

A cold breeze sneaked impishly through Siska's body, penetrating her soft skin before coming to rest against bone, making it even harder to fall sleep. She again pulled up the blanket, covering herself thoroughly.

Siska glanced at Syamsul Bachtiar, her husband, who was sleeping like a log by her side. A high-flier who had successfully built up his media business, his elegantly square face was striking, though his body did not exude strength.



He was sleeping again with his gold-plated glasses on—a bad habit.

The phone rang again. Syamsul had always wanted to install a phone in their room, but she had always forgot to buy another one.

She didn't dare wake him up. Slothfully, Siska got up and placed her feet on the cold marble floor. She dragged her reluctant steps outside the bedroom and toward the stairs.

So dark! She had always been afraid of the dark, easily frightened since she was a child. Walking warily, she slid against the wall desperately searching for a light switch.

Siska sighed with relief as the light came on. The antique clock showed the exact time: 12:15 a.m.

She saw the TV, sofa and a pile of scattered newspapers. Hours ago, she and Syamsul had sat here in the living room watching movies. But Siska left for bed early after her husband, a devout fan of horrors and thrillers, switched the DVD to his favorite film.

"Sorry honey, I'm so tired but I just can't miss this masterpiece," apologized Syamsul before presenting a good-night kiss. Siska couldn't stand horror flicks; she hated them.

It was just another evening between the two of them. They longed for kids, but she stopped consulting doctors after one illmannered quack declared that she was infertile.

As she was climbing down the stairs, the phone rang again. It was dark as hell down there. She was again forced to grope around like a blind woman.

In the split second after she turned on the light, the phone rang so impatiently, like a hungry dog barking to be fed.

"Hello?" she grumbled, picking up the phone on a small wooden stand.

No answer.

"Hello?!" Still no answer. She suddenly felt spooked. All the things in the room—the paintings, tables, sofa, walls—seemed to be staring through her as she stood like the accused.

Trembling, she rushed back toward the stairs, only to be checked by the phone, ringing, again. She turned around, walked back and angrily grabbed the phone.

"Hello!!"

A pause, and a male voice was on the other end. "Siska Anggraini?" splashing gently into her ear like a wave on the shore. She didn't recognize the voice.

"Who the hell are you? Why are you calling at this time?!" she raged.

"Well, you don't need to know who I am, but I'm calling for a reason. Besides, you haven't slept yet, have you?" said the man.

Siska frowned. "What do you want?" No answer, so she pressed on. "Do you want me to report this to the police? They could easily find you!"

She heard the giggle in his voice.

"I've been doing this for a long time, and the people I've called haven't been able to call anyone else ever again, let alone the police."

"How do you know me? Have we ever met?" her curiosity got the better of her.

"No, we haven't met, but I always know who'll answer my calls," said the man, calm. "And I've been watching you. I can see you're wearing a purple nightgown. Am I right?"

Siska was shaken. She panicked. Her eyes quickly swept around the spacious room, but all the windows and doors were shut tight, no gap or crack exposed.

No possibility that someone out there was secretly peeping on her, except for the painting by Basuki Abdullah of a proud Javanese aristocrat, whose eagle eyes always stared haughtily.

A string of tension was vibrating into her consciousness and beginning to torture her soul.

"Are you human... or a ghost?" Siska's voice almost failed her.

"It's up to you how you regard me," whispered the man.

Her stomach fell abruptly. She screamed, hoping frantically that Syamsul would wake up. But the notorious silence soon

swallowed her scream without any sign that her husband had been bothered enough to awaken.

She started to sweat heavily. Her heart was beating faster. Her gown became wet and chilly, its increasing transparency exposing her smooth skin and lean body. She thought she had no choice but to run upstairs and shaking her husband awake.

"No!" commanded the man. "Don't drag Syamsul into your problem. It's none of his business. This is between you and me."

Siska wanted to wrench herself free from the phone, but her feet seemed to have been tied to the spot. She collected her remaining nerves and pleaded, "So tell me what this business is."

"All right, but I feel uncomfortable when you're nervous like this. Please be calm, calm..." So suggestive, so much gentler. "Please be calm ... no need to be afraid, Siska..."

Bizarrely, Siska gradually grew composed. Her heart was again beating almost normally.

"It seems that you are now prepared to listen to me," he uttered after a long silence, which appeared to confirm that Siska was more in control of herself.

"I might be ready to listen, but I have a question first. How do you know my husband's name? Are you somehow connected with him?"

The man burst into long laughter. "What a shameful accusation! I know him, but he doesn't know me. This is my unsurpassed expertise—I have a list of names of people in the world and I always know what's going on in their minds. I don't need to elaborate on this; it's beyond human," he said imperiously.

"Sure, I'm not stupid," said Siska.

"Now I also have a question for you. Have you ever committed a grave mistake in your life?"

"A grave mistake?" Siska was dazed, trying to recall her past. Her first failed marriage might have been her only big mistake.

"Like robbery or ... maybe murder?" his voice rose on the last word.

"N-no, never," Siska started trembling again. "I have never done such dreadful things."

"You are lying. I swear to you that I will never tell anyone, not even your husband."

"I have never done such things! Besides, it's none of your business!"

"I predicted that you would flatly deny it." But he did not sound disappointed.

"What is it you want??" Siska wanted to end this conversation, but somehow she was unable to cut the phone.

"You promised that you were ready to listen to me, which means—as far as I understand—we should engage in a frank discussion," but again, oddly, he did not sound insistent.

"I have never made any promises to you."

"Never mind, I know your ins-and-outs anyway, Siska Anggraini. You are such an awful paradox. You are afraid of the dark and are easily frightened, but ironically, you have no fear in committing the cruelest act ever by human being.

"Remember your first marriage to Sutrisno Mangkunegolo, a well-off retailer? You killed him to inherit all his money. You chopped up his body into pieces. Unbelievable this was done by such a sweet-looking woman like you. You then framed your brother-in-law—with whom you had had a love affair, I should add—and had him thrown behind bars while you went free.

"You are sick! You might look like an angel," he whispered in a tone that was at once piercing, "but one with an evil heart and cunning."

"Enough!!" Siska bit her lips, thin from fear.

"You might have succeeded in your first attempt. Now you're married to a media mogul, Syamsul Bachtiar, and you are planning the same cruel scenario. You snake in the grass!"

"Do you want money?!" exploded Siska.

"I need no money," replied the man, politely.

Siska pressed her hand on her nightgown, bending over a little.

It was getting chillier. "Then what do you want?" she muttered, hissing in an almost inaudible voice. "Do you want me to...?"

"No, thank you. I don't need your body. Besides—I'm sorry to say this—you're not my type."

The man's words stabbed at her very heart.

Syamsul had no alibi. He was in the house at the time the murder had occurred. Siska's body was found brutally mutilated, her severed hand still holding the telephone, her wedding ring still glimmering on her finger.

Syamsul had fainted upon discovering the gruesome scene in the early morning.

He had loved his wife so deeply, a woman with a childlike, carefree mind and a sweet heart. He had no idea who had taken her life nor why. Perhaps his business rivals? Or did his wife have enemies? But all the windows and doors had been completely locked. Nothing was broken. Nothing was out of place.

"In the name of God, I had no reason to kill my wife!" he cried at court.

But the judge uncompromisingly sentenced Syamsul to 20 years in prison for killing his wife, Siska Anggraini, during the most talked-about trial in the country.

He refused to appeal.

During his dreary 20-year prison term, he filled the walls of his cell with his wife's pictures and killed the time by staring at them. On the day of his release, he went straight to his wife's grave.

While hugging her tombstone he vowed, "I swear to God, I will find the man who did this!"

Syamsul's media empire had gone bankrupt. The house was the only property he had to his name. He could sell the house or borrow money from the bank to start another business.

But the euphoria of press freedom following the collapse of

the New Order regime almost two decades ago seemed to have completely faded away, and competition in the media industry appeared to be getting tighter and tighter, as people were more meticulous and selective about high-quality media.

He might need to explore a new business avenue.

Syamsul had fallen from grace almost completely. Worse still, his migraine was getting so worse that it often attacked him violently out of the blue.

He was relaxing in the living room, stretching out his body and weary soul.

"You will always be my angel," he sobbed, taking off his glasses and tenderly touching a picture of his late wife with the tip of his fingers.

All the furniture remained as before, although they were covered in dust, but the TV and other electronics were predictably out of order. Their collection of now out-of-date movies was still here.

Well, at least he had already reactivated the electricity and telephone.

And he had two pressing jobs on the table: Build a new life and avenge himself on the man who had killed his wife.

For Syamsul, it could only be an eye for an eye...

But he needed to rest first. Life in prison was no vacation.

He inhaled deeply before trying to steal some sleep on the couch. It was already dark outside, and it was starting to get chilly, perhaps because it had just stopped raining.

Syamsul snatched a grubby blanket from the bedroom and covered his head with both hands, desperately trying to stop the painful migraine as he felt it beginning to attack him again.

His mind, nevertheless, endlessly replayed memories of momentous events with Siska: A candlelight dinner in Paris, a gondola cruise in Venice, an opera in Sydney, a heated argument on a Phuket beach that ended in a passionate evening.

Through his reveries and migraine, he heard the telephone downstairs ringing. •

— Jakarta, July 24, 2005, after fixing the phone

Illustration: The Jakarta Post

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Neighbors RI, Australia Must Learn to Live Together

Ihe love-hate relationship between Indonesia and neighboring Australia has again come to the fore following Australia's decision to grant temporary visas to Papuan asylum seekers. Indonesia was dazed and perplexed-gasping in surprise at how swiftly Australia maneuvered its policy form halting Middle Easterners from entering the country illegally, to welcoming the Papuans who also entered the country illegally.

Bizarrely for many Indonesians, the Australian government reiterated its support for Indonesia's territorial integrity and said it did not support any Papuan independence movement. As if granting the visas to the asylum seekers was an isolated incident.

Such perceived "double standards" are certainly hard to digest for many Indonesians, particularly for the nationalists who are increasingly sure that relations with the "double-faced" Australia will only disturb Indonesia's international standing, and therefore strongly urge the government to cut diplomatic ties with the country.

Bear in mind that Australia has shrewdly built up its massive "social capital" in Indonesia by flooding considerable social and economic assistance into the country, particularly after the 2002 Bali bombings and the tsunami in Aceh. Considering this, it is unlikely that Indonesia—a country whose mismanagement by corrupt leaders has transformed it into a "beggar" nation—would severe diplomatic ties with its rich southern neighbor.

Thus, the recalling of Indonesia's ambassador to Australia might have been a blunder, with the impulsive Vice President Jusuf Kalla trying to play hardball with Australia by demanding that

the country provide an "adequate" explanation before Indonesia could send back its ambassador.

What seems certain is that after building up so much social capital, Australia might have been tempted to use this case to test the waters of its influence over its northern neighbor. Indonesia, as the fourth most populous country and the country with the largest Muslim population, is too important for Australia to ignore.

During the authoritarian New Order regime, for Australia under Paul Keating's administration relations with Indonesia were relatively easier to handle, as long as the strongman Soeharto did not feel disturbed. After becoming a democracy, Indonesia's political leadership became fragmented and unpredictable, and exerting significant influence over the country poses a fresh challenge for Australia under John Howard.

The way Australia handled the Papuan asylum seekers issue might not be pleasant for Indonesia, but this is a prism through which Australia can measure public reaction in the newly democratic Indonesia. At the same time, Australia might have also used the case to show its displeasure over the plight of Papuans who are still suffering unfair treatment and human rights abuses, scoring additional points for Australia in the area of human rights.

Indonesia's reaction might have been excessive and reactionary, but with the country now embracing democracy, Australia should realize that Indonesia is on the right path toward maturing as a nation.

Indonesia, on the other hand, should also realize that with all the limitations and shortcomings of the learning period it is going through as a new democracy—including its still miserable failure to treat Papuans in a fair and humane manner—it has few choices but to be more levelheaded toward the political attitude of its southern neighbor.

And with members of both governments showing displeasure over disdainful cartoons printed by the free media in both countries, the two neighbors likewise need to be aware of the

pressing need for relations to be mutually inclusive, not mutually exclusive. For jingoists in the two countries, the proximity of the two might be a bitter fact—but it is morally inescapable.

Thus, building relations based on the spirit of heartfelt neighborliness is the dignified choice, if we are to have productive and lasting relations. It is not always easy; indeed, nationalistic sentiments and feelings of superiority might always lure the politicians to put the relationship to the test, sparking undue political fire.

Even in day-to-day life, relations between neighbors are not always genuine, unless there is a specifically emotional interest that truly binds us. We might feel that we need to be kind to our closest neighbors on the mere grounds that they will at least phone us if they see trespassers in our yard.

But if we have strained relations with our immediate neighbors, though putting on a straight face, we will still feel uncomfortable when walking out of our house. An unpleasant way to start the day, isn't it? The comical thing is that we might not need a third party to help mend our strained relations, as at the end of the day we will all realize that no one benefits from this furor. •

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Jacklevyn Frits Manuputty: Promoting Reconciliation Among Maluku People

acklevyn "Jacky" Frits Manuputty is well-built, which gives him the appearance of an athlete rather than a Protestant priest.

But he is no mere priest who preaches from an ivory tower; he is also an energetic social activist who has traveled to remote parts of Maluku and other regions of Indonesia to feel for himself the grassroots pulse.



His travels and dialogs with people from a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds, especially with those marginalized by the march of modernity like poor fishermen or farmers, has bolstered his awareness, not only of acute social problems but also the wide diversity of people in this country.

His sensitivity toward diversity and its related challenges developed a long time ago. Born on July 20, 1965, in Christian Haruku village, Haruku island, Central Maluku, young Jacky often accompanied his uncle, an upu latu (village chief), who visited neighboring Muslim Rohomoni village, both in official and informal capacities, to strengthen relations between the two communities.

In Maluku tradition, his mother's fam of Ririmase (Christianity) is believed to have the same genealogy as the fam of Sangaji (Islam) under the soa of Mone. The soa is an institutionalized tradition that oversees several fam believed to have the same genealogy.

"So we visit each other, not only on religious holidays such as Idul Fitri and Christmas, but also for family events such as weddings or get-togethers when one of our children is due to go to a new school and needs help," he said during a recent interworking group visit forum in Ambon organized by the International Center for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP) in collaboration with the European Commission.

The forum was attended by peacemakers from other troublespots, Poso and Pontianak.

"I'm affectionately referred to as 'Abang Imam' by Muslim families," he said, smiling.

However, he began to feel the silent tension between the two communities while still at senior high school in Ambon. The competition for the leadership of OSIS (a student organization), for instance, was colored by religious overtones.

Students became polarized by mostly two ibadah (prayer) groups of Christians and Muslims that gradually sowed the seeds of mutual suspicion and prejudice.

That is the point in his life at which he became aware that enhancing the spirit of brotherhood between religious communities is a continuous process and, if not managed carefully, could become a time bomb that could explode and destroy them.

He decided to become a priest because he believes religion plays an important role in Maluku society and people still listen to their religious leaders.

He studied at the Driyarkara School of Theology and Philosophy in Jakarta and later served as a priest in Haria village in Saparua island, Maluku.

He recalled that he and his wife were about to visit Muslim relatives

at Idul Fitri in Batu Merah district when an altercation between a public minivan driver and a passenger later escalated into massive violence in and around Ambon on Jan. 19, 1999.

"There was a mass mobilization and polarization of people in just one day," he said, recalling his bewilderment. Muslims were identified by white ribbons, Christians red.

"Agents provocateurs could be found in both Muslim and Christian areas. In a Muslim area of Waihong, a man with a military haircut stood on a jeep shouting about separatism. In Christian areas a message on the need to expel BBM (Buton, Bugis and Makassar) ethnic groups—often migrant Muslims—spread fast."

Massive and bloody violence was inevitable. Thousands were murdered without mercy; many were trapped helplessly in the archipelagic province.

Kidnaping, lynching and mutilation were carried out with ritual fervor. Even the sea in Maluku became a mass grave, which deterred people from eating fish for years. Fear and brutality became everyday realities.

After years of sporadic effort, "I felt ashamed that much of the reconciliation was initiated by outsiders," Jacky said, referring to a bakubae movement that he blasted as "workshop-to-workshop forums in Java" that did little to take account of local circumstances and traditions.

After publicly signing up to the historic Malino II peace agreement, Jacky and his colleagues from the Protestant Church of Maluku (GPM), where he served as secretary at its crisis center, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) of Maluku and the Diocese of Ambon established an organization known as the Maluku Interfaith Institution for Humanitarian Action (ELALEM) in December 2003.

"Most of the responsibility rests on the shoulders of Maluku people," he declared. Jacky was unanimously elected as its director by the board.

During its first year, ELALEM provided a forum for people to discuss their ideas on how to solve Maluku's social problems and find the realistic means to address them. This involved students. politicians, journalists, religious figures and intellectuals.

His travels and meetings with communities in Maluku and people as far afield as Lembah Baliem, Papua; Musi River, Kalimantan; and Waduk Gajah Mungkur, Central Java, have inspired him to adopt two crucial themes for the organization: economy and education.

With support from the United Nations Development Program ELALEM aims to raise the quality of social, cultural and economic life to demonstrate the spirit of survival of Maluku's religious communities.

ELALEM programs include institutional capacity-building, developing positive public perceptions and building a network of pluralism observers to promote peace and community empowerment.

In the economic sector, ELALEM has assisted the local government to draw up an economic plan for several villages, especially those on the coast.

In collaboration with the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and local governments, ELALEM organized a technical cooperation project called Reintegration Support through Rebuilding Communities, which has three basic pillars: economy, social life and security.

In the education sector, ELALEM produces movies that carry cultural messages to be distributed to students and, together with the local government and education experts from Pattimura University, has developed a peace curriculum.

A group of teachers from pilot schools have just been trained in the curriculum. For counseling, ELALEM has trained facilitators

for three districts: Baguala, Sirimau and Nusa Niwe.

ELALEM has also called on Christian and Muslim figures to find agreement on what are called peace sermons. These figures have agreed to using peace messages during their sermons in their respective communities.

Jacky, who also teaches Western philosophy at the Indonesian Christian University of Maluku (UKIM), has traveled extensively—to the U.S., Sri Lanka, Australia, France, Holland, Switzerland, Belgium, Britain, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines—to share his experiences at a number of forums.

Nevertheless, this has not been without challenges. During the conflict, his parents' house was burned down by a mob of fanatics who accused him of being a collaborator. Luckily no one hurt.

Jacky has no regrets: "It was just part of the struggle," he said. •

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Khalida Salimi: Women's Activist in Pakistan

n the 1970s Khalida Salimi was at Lahore College for Women studying Sociology and Journalism.

She was actively involved in challenging General Ziaul-Haq's military government, which strictly imposed Hudood Ordinances, a set of Islamic penal laws misused to discriminate against women.

Nevertheless, Pakistan's fragmented and unpredictable political circumstances are always complex.



Now, as a women's activist she is still struggling to repeal the laws, but in a very different situation: vehement opposition from the elected members of the parliament. There are 342 seats in the

National Assembly of Pakistan; 72 women are currently members, and Pakistani law requires that at least 20% of the members be women.

"However, the irony is that any attempt by the current government of President Pervez Musharraf to reform the law has always failed due to strong resistance from the Muttahida Majlise-Amal (MMA)," Khalida said, referring to an alliance of six anti-Western Islamic groups, which stunned many by its success in the 2002 elections.

Though not a majority, these influential religious groups delivered a notable electoral success after the Musharraf-led military government permitted an election.

"Unlike Zia, Musharraf is known to be progressive when it comes to women's rights issues; he lent his political support to efforts to repeal or drastically amend legislation," she said.

In Pakistan, where 97 percent of the population is Muslim and where patriarchal culture is still strong, the problems of Muslim women are worsened by the existence of Hudood Ordinances, which classify levels of crime and carry severe punishment. The ordinance includes an adultery law that can mean female victims of rape may end up in jail.

After the lapse of a quarter century, the legislation did not contribute to the "Islamization" of society, she said. On the other hand, mishandling of the laws has resulted in victimization of weaker elements of society, especially women.

"Women are regarded as a possession of man, and women's awareness of their rights is still very low," said Khalida during a study tour of activists from South Asian countries organized by the International Center for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP) in collaboration with The Asia Foundation in Jakarta.

Khalida conceptualized, designed and implemented a project themed Women in Crisis in 1989. She later established a nongovernmental organization (NGO) named Sach (truth) in 1993, which has now received special consultative status by the United

Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and has also been accredited by the UN's Department of Public Information.

Sach has been dealing with human rights abuses, with particular focus on the well-being of survivors of torture. The NGO has been working for the nondiscriminatory rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors of organized violence and torture.

Sach is committed to working towards a torture- and violencefree society. It achieves this by sensitizing people and providing a variety of services to torture survivors.

This includes medical help to deal with all kinds of medical problems, as well as psychotherapy assistance aimed at helping the survivors deal effectively with their painful experience.

Physiotherapy is used to treat injuries sustained as a result of physical and psychological torture; stress tension reduction and life skills workshops incorporate exercises and massage for stress tension reduction therapy.

Socioeconomic support is given in the form of legal assistance, temporary shelter facilities, small business training and counseling. Sach also gives vocational training to women, though it applies certain "strategies" to do this.

"We always emphasize that the skills would only enable women to be productive at home," Khalida explained of the difficulty in gaining acceptance of wider society where patriarchal culture is still entrenched with regard to the increased role of women in the public sphere.

Recalling the agony that women had to suffer in her country, Khalida said that during her long experience as a women's activist she was once called by a doctor from a hospital to counsel someone who had been brutally tortured by her husband.

"The woman ran a successful milk business and her husband seemed to resent this. He delivered bottles of milk to his friends who never paid, which angered the wife. But the husband tied her up and chopped off her nose.

"He brutally deformed her. The very first thing she asked me was `Am I going to get my nose or my hair back?" said Khalida, imitating the trembling woman. She also added that an Australian volunteer who accompanied her fainted immediately upon seeing such brutality.

"But we enabled her to put her life back together. We supported her to undergo plastic surgery. The couple got divorced, but her husband was freed from jail due to pressure from the village where they came from."

"Even Khadijah, the wife of prophet Muhammad, is a successful entrepreneur, so why don't you let us explore our potential and be productive to contribute to the economic life of the nation?" Khalida challenged.

Born on May 7, 1956 in Lahore, Khalida is married to Javaid Mehmood, an English professor. They have three children. She said that she always receives support from her husband for her social activism.

If she was extremely busy, she often let her husband go alone to weddings or family gatherings—bizarre in a society where a wife is regarded as a servant of her husband and must be ready to accompany and serve him on important occasions.

"He might have had to put up with wagging tongues, but he never says so," Khalida said. •

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Moeslim Abdurrahman: Fighting Against Religious Conservatism

uslim scholar and activist Moeslim Abdurrahman cannot hide his anxiety.

Conservatism is allegedly growing within Muhammadiyah, the country's second-largest Muslim organization, which claims to have 30 million members in Indonesia.

"I'm worried about the future of Muhammadiyah, once dubbed a modernist and reformist organization. Exclusivism and intolerance seem to be growing even stronger now," he told The Jakarta Post at his office in Mampang, South Jakarta.



During Tanwir (a national leadership meeting) in Bali, January 2002, together with other leaders of Muhammadiyah, Moeslim conceptualized a dakwah kultural (cultural preaching approach)

that was aimed at deconstructing the monolithic interpretation of Islamic religiosity by accommodating the cultural and local values that are rich in pluralistic Indonesian society.

Nevertheless, there was strong resistance from conservative sections of Muhammadiyah, which suspected dakwah kultural as having the potential to accommodate bid'ah (heresy), regarded as being against the founding ideal of Muhammadiyah, established in 1912 by K. H. Ahmad Dahlan, to purify Islam from such belief.

As the debate continued, many narrowly interpreted dakwah kultural as a mere expression of the spread of Islamic teaching through the arts such as music and songs. During the following Tanwir in Makassar, June 2003, the concept was further distorted to the "Islamization" of the arts.

"Bid'ah should be re-interpreted," he argued, adding that although Islam has a universal principle, in practice it has been translated into ethnolocal Islam such as Nahdlatul Ulama in Java, Nahdlatul Wathan (Nusa Tenggara Barat), Mathlaul Anwar (Banten) and Darul Dakwah wal-Irsyad (Makassar).

"Nevertheless, many young members of Muhammadiyah who promote pluralism seem to do it as a mere defense, while blaming their previous leaders for destroying locality with their reform movement," Moeslim said, pointing that the effort has lost its substance.

Born Aug 8, 1948 to a Muhammadiyah family in Lamongan, East Java, after completing elementary school, he was sent by his parents to Raudlatul Ilmiyah Islamic boarding school in Kertosono. His parents hoped that he would become a young cleric.

But Moeslim insisted on continuing his education. Registering as a student of the Tarbiyah Program at Muhammadiyah Surakarta University and soon becoming active in student organizations, his understanding of Islamic religiosity was gradually transformed from the normative to the empirical domain, from monolithic to pluralistic interpretation.

Moeslim later received his Masters and PhD in anthropology

from the University of Illinois, Urbana, U.S.

Continuing as a social activist, he became increasingly assured that the level of piety of each individual is different, depending on social and cultural factors that shape their understanding of religious doctrine.

"But they have the right to claim that they are close to God," he said in between puffs of a cigarette during a breaking-of-the-fast gathering at his office.

Moeslim befriended young members of Nahdlatul Ulama such as some of those at the Institute of the Empowerment of Pesantren and Society (P3M), whom he considered more progressive than those at Muhammadiyah.

He became a member of the Advisory Board of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), director of the Ma'arif Institute for Culture and Humanity and director of the Institute of Social Science Development (LPIS).

He once worked as a civil servant at the research and development department of the Ministry of Religious Affairs for 12 years. In the media sector, he was assistant to the editor-in-chief of Pelita daily and head of research at the Post for two years and one year respectively.

He declined positions as a permanent member of teaching staff, and instead opted to teach part-time in the graduate program of anthropology and political science of the University of Indonesia and the graduate program in anthropology and philosophy at Muhammadiyah Surakarta University.

He was also extensively involved in social activism to promote understanding that plurality is a fact of life in Indonesia, with all its diversity.

In 2000, Muhammadiyah chairman Ahmad Syafi'i Maarif persuaded him to return to Muhammadiyah. Moeslim headed the division for the empowerment of laborers, farmers and fisherman of Muhammadiyah Central Board besides being a director of al-Ma'un Institute, an organization he formed to realize his idealism.

Asked why what he perceived a growing conservatism and intolerance were to be found in Muhammadiyah, Moeslim replied, "Due to feelings of inferiority. Generally, Muslims particularly those in Muhammadiyah, feel they have lost the battle in almost every field," he said.

"For example, many perceive the growing number of non-Muslim schools in big cities as a threat—as rivals that could disturb the existence and aqidah (religious doctrine) of the Muslim ones," he said

It is because of this that even the celebration of Christmas was treated as a theological rather than social matter, he said with regret.

He continued that as globalization is irresistible, there are two possible reactions from society: "First is anxiety that everything will be attacked and replaced by new norms and beliefs. Second, total rejection of change - toward everything coming from outside, followed by an exclusivist attitude."

"The first is a common phenomenon that can be found in any society, any organization, or any organized religion, but the second is dangerous. I'm worried—I hope I'm mistaken—that Muhammadiyah is showing signs of the second reaction. If that's the case, Muhammadiyah might end up as a mere community movement," he warned, emphasizing that Muhammadayh was originally conceived as an urban movement.

During the 45th Muktamar (national congress) of Muhammadiyah in Malang in July 2005, which saw an end to Ahmad Syafi'i Maarif's leadership, Moeslim and other progressive leaders such as Amin Abdullah and Abdul Munir Mulkhan were sidelined by the perceived growing number of conservatives in Muhammadiyah.

Muhammadiyah scholar Pradana Boy Zulian Thobibul Fata, who is currently writing a thesis on the conservative and liberal forces within Muhammadiyah at the Australian National University, said many believed that the new leadership had flirted with powerful conservative wings to ensure their election.

But Moeslim is not losing hope. He is surrounded by a number of young and progressive Muhammadiyah members who, with his help, formed a loose organization, Muhammadiyah Youth Intellectual Network (JIMM) in 2003.

It consists of liberal-minded members such as Zuly Qodir, Tuty Alawiah, Piet Khaidir, Ahmad Fuad Fanani, Andar Nubowo and others.

Scholar Pradana Boy said that Moeslim in pinning a lot hope on these young members to provide Muhammadiyah with a new image—now or in the future—although he urged JIMM to be more independent and to also reach out to other senior leaders.

"The problem is that JIMM has difficulty in finding other senior intellectual patrons other than Moeslim, as Muhammadiyah lacks leaders like him with a high level of intellectuality but with strong commitment to nurture younger members," he said.

He added that in spite of this, the battle for minds within Muhammadiyah is unstoppable. •

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Eva Kusuma Sundari: Tackling Society's Misconceptions of Women



the role of women and their social situation in Indonesia, Eva Kusuma Sundari looked gloomy and disappointed.

However, she immediately bombarded The Jakarta Post with facts and arguments during an interview at her office in the House of Representatives here.

"People are usually

unaware of women's contribution to this country's development, which is significant, "said Eva, a legislator from the opposition PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), who is also a member of the House commission that oversees legal matters, regulation, human rights and security.

Eva gave an example: In the small and medium business sector, which accounts for about 40 million businesses here, about 80 percent are operated by women, she said.

"The nation was able to emerge from the 1998 economic crisis thanks to the role of women in the sector, but does the public recognize that?"

With a rising voice she added, "The role of women is invisible! Even public policy does not acknowledge this powerful section of our society."

Low awareness regarding the role of women can be traced to the education sector, which seldom touches on issues of social marginalization.

For example, when she studied development economics at Airlangga University, Surabaya, she did not hear much about urban poverty, mistreatment of workers or other social ills.

Recalling how disempowering our society can be toward women, Eva cited a research finding from Sampang, Madura, in 2002, which showed that reciting the Koran is considered far more important than learning the Roman alphabet.

"What is the result? Many housewives have inadequate understanding about sanitation and nutrition, which is detrimental to their family's well-being."

A Muslim herself, Eva highlighted that there should be a balance in learning religion and simple but important life skills.

Eva recalled another piece of research that indicates a high fatality rate for women and children, forced marriages at a young age and a high dropout rate from elementary school.

"Women are systematically and culturally marginalized, " she said.

Born Oct. 8, 1965, in Nganjuk, Eva continued her studies after graduating from Airlangga. Her first Masters was in the politics of alternative development strategies from the Institute of Social Studies in the Netherlands in 1996; her thesis was on traditional Javanese markets and their impact on the local economies of related villages.

Her second Masters was in economics and development economics from the University of Nottingham, U.K., in 2000, with a thesis on the role of the local public sector on regional economic growth and the impact of decentralization on poverty alleviation.

Eva became a member of the teaching staff at her alma mater and was extensively involved in research at the Center for Research and Studies for Women (PPSW) at the same university.

The research included Women Politicians and their Articulation of Gender Interests (1997); Impacts of External Debt on Women: An Analysis of Stabilization Policy during the Crisis (2001) and Analysis of the Inter-Sectoral Program for Women's Empowerment (2001).

She also produced Violence towards Street Women Sexual Workers in Joyoboyo (Surabaya) Terminal (2002); and The Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming Strategy by Local Governments in Surabaya, Pasuruan, Madiun and Pamekasan (East Java) (2004).

She became an advisor to the women's advancement program for the East Java provincial government in 2002, program officer for gender and women's participation at The Asia Foundation from 2003 to 2005 and gender consultant at the same institution in 2005.

Asked why she ventured into the world of politics, she frowned, saying, "What do you mean by politics? Fighting for the cause of women is everyday politics for me."

She started while still a student. As a former activist of the Indonesian National Student Movement (GMNI), it was during her student days that she established relations with the nationalists.

She finally quit her teaching career in 2004 and became a member of the House of Representatives in 2005 for PDI-P; she is now one of the 13.8 percent of woman legislators in the national legislature.

She is also a member of the ASEAN Inter-Parliament Myanmar Caucus, which struggled to bring democracy to Myanmar and to free its woman leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who is under house arrest under the orders of the junta.

Asked what should be done to effectively introduce gender equality in Indonesia, she said all responsible citizens are morally obliged to show greater appreciation of women.

However, the state as an agent of transformation should work harder to formulate policies that are antidiscriminatory and support gender equality.

"The Office of the State Minister of Women's Empowerment should take the role of catalyst in this initiative," she said, referring to a task force formed by the office.

It comprises officials from all ministries to ensure that women's issues are substantively incorporated within all government policies.

Nonetheless, the task force is very weak—even impotent because it comprises low-level officials, so nobody in the government feels obliged to heed its recommendations properly.

"Also, the office should do more to influence strategic policy, but instead it acts like a non governmental organization merely running training sessions and workshops," she lamented.

She likewise deplored many regional sharia-inspired regulations that are perceived as disadvantageous to women.

"In Tangerang, the wage of a laborer can only cover minimal physical needs, not minimal living needs. This means a woman laborer needs to work overtime if she wants to cover the latter.

"Yet, how crazy it is that the local government issued a regulation that prohibits women from being outside in the evening," she said.

She added that these regulations are having a negative economic impact. For example, 50 large companies in one region need to close down because they can no longer produce kebaya, traditional blouses that are considered immoral by hard-line conservatives.

Needless to say, there is a growing number of women laborers desperate to work overseas as domestic industry cannot absorb them, she warned.

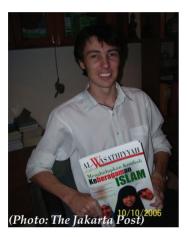
She said the misconceptions about women that are deeply entrenched in society need to be tackled at the grass roots. She recalled her time as a researcher and the story of a pregnant woman who bled heavily at a critical stage of delivering her baby.

"The family panicked but her husband refused to take her to the hospital straight away; instead, he waited for a kyai (religious figure) to go to their house to advise them. The woman died," she said.

"And this is all reflected in our movies on TV-religion is reduced to superstition and is conveyed as something frightening, while women are portrayed as stupid, heavily dependent and the root of evil." •

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Jordan Newton: Volunteering To Bridge Australia-RI Gap



Newton visited Persatuan Islam (Persis) Islamic school in Bandung last August for a dialog with its students, he was confronted with an inconceivable, yet intriguing question from one of the students: "Is it true that there is a deal between the Vatican, the U.S. and Israel that if Tibo's execution is canceled, Israel will stop attacking Lebanon?"

The question was timely: The execution of the three Catholics accused of murdering Muslims in Poso was delayed allegedly due to international pressure. It was also the peak of Israel's military offensive to wipe out Hizbollah in Lebanon.

Newton was bewildered, trying to answer diplomatically that although the Vatican, the U.S. and Israel are oddly classified as "the West", they don't always agree on everything, and that such a conspiracy theory was just absurd.

What is clear is that he was presented with a fresh experience of how some sectors in Indonesia still have a very limited understanding of the West. This, he said, also applies to the often love-hate relations between Indonesia and Australia.

"Acute lack of knowledge on both sides," he said, partly blaming the media for inaccurate information. In the Australian media, Indonesia is always portrayed as either politically unstable or a country always racked with natural disasters. While in the Indonesian media, Australia is often perceived as an arrogant country that is always more than willing to interfere in Indonesian domestic affairs."

"Like the East Timor issue, many here don't understand that Australians once felt guilty as they left the East Timorese alone when the island was invaded by the Japanese, so there is an element of a historical background," Newton said during an interview with The Jakarta Post at the International Center for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP) office in South Jakarta, where he is volunteering as a communications officer under a one-year government sanctioned Australian Volunteers International (AVI) program.

"And when I was in high school, I did not even know where to locate Indonesia on the map!"

Born on Feb. 26, 1983 to a Catholic family in Young, New South Wales, Newton became interested in studying Islam when he was studying at a Catholic high school. He chose to study Islam besides Catholicism as he thought that the religions should share many similarities. He became more curious after learning that Jesus, though portrayed as a prophet and not God, is also mentioned in the Koran and that the Koran acknowledges all prophets in Judaism and Christianity.

After completing high school, he attended an open house by the University of New South Wales (UNSW) where he enthusiastically listened to a presentation by Prof. David Reeve, then the director of Chinese and Indonesian studies at the university.

He chose to study Indonesian not only because the language seemed to be less difficult than Chinese, but because it was also in line with his growing interest in political Islam, particularly given the fact that Indonesia has the largest number of Muslims in the world. And, to be sure, the inescapable proximity of the two countries highlights the significance of the subject.

So, as part of a five-year undergraduate course at UNSW, he spent one academic year in Indonesia under the Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesia Studies. He spent 11 months at the University of Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, studying the language, exposing himself to the local culture with all its subtleties and observing the dynamics of the country's political Islam.

"It was a rewarding and unforgettable experience - it has deeply enriched my life," Newton recalled, staring at the ceiling for a while.

Well, indeed, that is also where romance began: his first meeting with a Javanese Muslim girl who has now become his girlfriend and who has been teaching him a lot about Islam.

Back in Australia he wrote his thesis on the emergence of the Justice and Welfare Party (PKS) in Indonesia's political landscape. He said that he was fascinated by the fact that in post-Soeharto Indonesia, religious parties wisely opted to channel their aspirations through a democratic process.

"Some Australian Indonesianists say that the PKS is a radical political entity with a dangerous agenda, but I found that they are just conservatives who do not always denote a negative image," he said, adding that he has several good friends who are affiliated with the Islamic political party, which is known for its concerted campaign for good governance.

The rise of the PKS in separable from societies' dissatisfaction with what they perceive as injustice and corruption that are omnipresent, "he observed.

Newton received the UNSW Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Honors Scholarship Award in 2005 for his dedication to the chosen subject.

He also befriended Indonesian Muslims from a wide spectrum of groups, from those regarded as conservative to the more liberal ones. Nevertheless, he said with regret that there seems to be a severe lack of productive dialog between the two competing groups.

"Instead of engaging in a dialog, there seems to be a phobia

from each group with both trading barren accusations. The liberal or the progressive accuses the conservatives of being radical and intolerant, while the latter accuses the former of being Western puppets."

"Still, my knowledge of Islam and Indonesia is still limited," he said humbly, in fluent Indonesian. He added that one of his aspirations is to help correct the wrong perception of his fellow Australians over Indonesia as a Muslim country.

"Indonesia is now arguably a democratic country, so there is a golden opportunity for Indonesia and Australia to search for more common ground," Newton said, adding that a lot can be done to enhance relations between the two neighboring countries.

He gave an example of tolerance and harmony that are actually rooted in Indonesian diverse societies. And in Australia they have the concept of giving people a "fair go" and a willingness to accept the plurality of societies.

"More contacts between people of the two countries can help to explore more similarities and understand the differences, and cement stronger relations," said Newton, whose parents are currently in the country to join Idul Fitri celebrations.

Newton, who has been struggling to fast this Ramadhan, seems to be well on the path to becoming a future prominent Indonesianist with an Indonesian heart. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, Oct. 18, 2006

Utomo Dananjaya: The Man Behind Breeding of Prominent Figures



Dananjaya, and you will feel his warm and witty candor.

However, despite his lively mind, the man who has organized Majelis Reboan (Wednesday Discussion Forum) for more than 20 years seemed to realize that his age is running fast and that it is timely for him to step down and let a younger generation take over the forum.

Perhaps he is aware that at the

end of the day his physical condition may not be reconciled with his often burning enthusiasm.

During a recent Mejelis Reboan, Utomo grabbed the microphone and talked briefly before the audience. The man whose smart jokes often cracked the atmosphere when a debate was getting tense, now spoke solemnly about his plan.

In a society where patronage is difficult to unlock, younger members often still push senior figures to maintain the leadership.

However, he assured The Jakarta Post during an interview at his office in Wisma Kodel here that some activists whom he has been nurturing and who always help him run the forum have declared their readiness.

"Since its inception in 1983 as a loose, non-structural and informal

forum, the forum was intended to enlighten people and to strengthen harmony by adhering to the spirit of diversity and pluralism," he said, adding that the forum should maintain this spirit.

The speakers and audience include intellectuals, student activists, bureaucrats, politicians, and professionals who also come from diverse religious backgrounds.

For example, one of the speakers that evening was a young Catholic priest. Some from the audience were Ahmadiyah members, who have been accused of spreading false Islamic teaching and have been recently subject to humiliation from the Muslim majority.

Several influential figures who had actively participated in the forum include Muslim intellectual and activist Masdar F. Mas'udi, Djohan Effendi, the late Ekky Sjahruddin, Abdurrahman Wahid and Moeslim Abdurrahman.

Non-Muslim intellectuals include Franz Magnis Suseno, Harry Tjan Silalahi, Ignas Kleden, Mudji Sutrisno, Jakob Oetama, the late Victor Tanja and many others.

Now, a new generation of intellectual figures have lightened up the forum, including Lutfi Assyaukani, Ioanes Rahmat, Yudi Latif, Andang Binawang, Hamid Basyaib and others.

Majelis Reboan is the embryo of the renowned Paramadina Foundation, which was co-founded by the late noted Muslim intellectual Nurcholish Madjid and Utomo himself.

"It was very personal initially," recalled Utomo. "When Nurcholish completed his doctorate from Chicago University, activist Ekky Sjahruddin came up with an idea of forming a group of discussion to welcome him."

"And it was Masdar. F. Mas'udi of the Nahdlatul Ulama who named this group Majelis Reboan, as it should meet every Wednesday," said Utomo, who is also known for his superb organizational skills.

"Abdurrahman Wahid would talk about politics, and after Maghrib (dusk prayer) Nurcholish would talk about religion and

spirituality," said Utomo, adding that the two were the "fuel" of the forum.

The forum roared to prominence after the election of Abdurrahman Wahid, (who later became the country's fourth President) as a chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama in the Situbondo congress.

The Kompas daily described the forum in its editorial as a group of young intellectuals and activists who were still pure and modest but were concerned with the development of the nation, said Utomo.

Didn't the authoritarian Soeharto's regime suspect this forum of having the potential to shake the establishment?

"I don't think so, probably because this forum also promoted diversity and pluralism, so it was somehow in line with the New Order's stand," said Utomo.

"We always maintained our position, that the azas tunggal (referring to Pancasila as the state's sole principle/ideology), is for the state, but a nation could have more than one ideology. So we always say Pancasila was an open ideology, and Soeharto didn't seem disturbed."

Concept of sole ideology received strong opposition from some other sections of Muslim communities in the 1980s, many of whom were jailed by the New Order. And Soeharto perhaps never realized that the forum helped strengthen civil society, which 20 years later helped his downfall.

"You may say it is an elitist group; but its members were all people who were strongly rooted in societies such as Abdurrahman Wahid, Ekky and Masdar. So they passed the ideas and messages they got from the forum into their respective communities."

Some members of the forum suggested that a foundation be established to help build an inclusive Islamic civilization. With Utomo's support, Nurcholish helped draft the constitution of the Paramadina Foundation, which later became a core engine for the reformation of Islamic thoughts in Indonesia.

It was also Utomo, then Public Relations Manager of the national arts center Ismail Marzuki Garden (TIM), who gave a recommendation to a commission of the Jakarta Arts Council to give Nurcholish a chance to speak at the influential TIM speech forum

History tells of how Nurcholish's speech on secularization provoked intense polemic and rocked the intellectual and religious circles at that time.

Born Feb. 6, 1936 in Kuningan, West Java, Utomo completed Elementary School in 1951, high school in 1957, and IKIP (Institute of Pedagogy and Teacher Training) Bandung in 1965.

He became a public junior high school teacher in Garut (1957-1964) and Bandung (1964-1966). But he left his teaching when he became Chairman of the Muslim Indonesian Students (PII) organization from 1967 to 1969.

"Being a Chairman of PII was a turning point in my life," said Utomo. "I was transformed from an extremist to a moderate Muslim."

PII also collaborated with the American Field Service (AFS), sending it best cadres to the U.S. to stay with American host families for a year in the country. Poet Taufiq Ismail, educationalist Arief Rahman, former minister Tanri Abeng and businessman Soegeng Sarjadi were among them.

In addition, Utomo was known as a "master of training" at the Institute for Research, Education, and Information of Social Study and Economics (LP3ES). He trained groups of activists from various non-government organizations.

Utomo is not only an aspirant that helped breed prominent figures; he is also an outspoken educationalist whose critical thoughts are influenced by those of Ivan Illich and Paolo Freire.

He described that education in this country has been severely reduced by a corrupt mentality, as it has been managed by people who are obsessed with nothing but power; not by those with proper knowledge, experience and commitment in education, he said.

But his idealism of education faced unprecedented challenges from some sections at the very university he helped establish: Paramadina University.

Utomo was forced to swallow a bitter pill when what he perceived to be a conventional lower level education was to be used in the graduate program at the university.

He retreated and decided to establish the Institute for Education Reform (IER), which is still under the university. One of its missions is to advocate for teacher professional development and autonomy by providing alternative educational policy.

Associations such as the Independent Teacher Forum of Indonesia (FGII) and Education Forum are among those receiving support from the IER.

Utomo—now a man with nine grandchildren—never lost his high spirit. Nonetheless, he eventually realized that everything has its limits.

After all, many of his able cadres that have spread in various sections of society are assured of the continuation of his idealism of a diverse nation whose members equally contribute to the development of the country. •

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Syafiq Hasyim: Gender Specialist Within Islam



Philosophy and Theology at the Faculty of Ushuluddin of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta in the 1990s.

During that time, he observed that many women's organizations had difficulty in advocating women's rights and in effectively transferring their ideas to the grass roots.

They were often accused of imposing Western values that were not always perceived to be in line with religious and local perceptions.

"In a country where religion, particularly Islam, plays a prominent role, we should speak in the language of Islam," Syafiq told The Jakarta Post.

As a person born to a Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) family 35 years ago and educated at the Matholi'ul Huda pesantren (Islamic boarding school) in Jepara, Central Java, for seven years, Syafiq is undoubtedly familiar with Islamic tradition and kitab kuning (classical texts).

NU is the largest Muslim organization in the country, and claims to have 40 million members.

However, his activism with the women's movement during his student days in Jakarta opened his eyes to the ugly reality of the position occupied by women in a country that often suffers from narrowmindedness.

Determined to devote his career to deconstructing the patriarchal mind-set of society, Syafiq joined the Indonesian Society for Pesantren and Community Development (P3M) in 1997 and became a researcher in the division of fiqh al-nisa', whose task is to research women's issues and advocate women's rights.

With his colleagues, Syafiq helped introduce a program of reproductive rights for Islamic women, taught at NU pesantren, supported by The Ford Foundation. It was the first time the country included such an enlightening program in its curriculum.

He recalled that they initially received strong resistance from kyai (religious figures), but they convinced them by arguing that the Islamic principle of regarding women highly should be translated into action.

However, P3M was still loosely affiliated with NU—some of whom still strictly hold fast to literal interpretations of Islam—and so Syafiq was plunged into a bitter debate on the issue of polygamy.

The issue reached a point that forced Syafiq to leave the organization in 2000.

He and his colleagues that shared the same aspirations established the Rahima Foundation in the same year, a more independent organization that focuses on the empowerment of women with an Islamic perspective.

It emphasizes the dissemination of information concerning women's rights within Islam to local community Muslim groups and pesantren.

After completing his Masters in Islamic Studies in the Netherlands, Syafiq became involved in a program with Rahima in building awareness of women's rights.

The program, which was supported by The Asia Foundation, was run in Tasikmalaya and Garut in West Java—places where local governments were enthusiastically introducing sharia-inspired laws amid the euphoria of regional autonomy.

Nevertheless, after preliminary research, it was found that people were not keen on such regulations, and the infamous Darul Islam movement, that had aspired to establish an Islamic state, is now considered mere history.

"There could also have been political and economic motives behind the initiatives," said Syafiq. "Allegedly, among them were the legitimization of polygamy and benefitting politically connected businesses by forcing women to wear Muslim attire."

Rahima collaborated with local community groups such as Nahdina, ASPER and LK-HAM in Tasikmalaya. In Garut, it cooperated with pesantren such as al Musadadiyah and those of NU, Persis and Muhammadiyah. The Women's Crisis Center was also established in Garut.

About 400 women and men together participated in the programs. Rahima introduced them to research carried out in many countries such as in Pakistan where the Hoodod Ordinances brought misery to women.

Also, through radio talk shows, the program reached a wider audience in an effort to discuss freely a wide range of issues from economic rights of women and domestic violence to leadership.

Now, many of the graduates of the two-year program have become prominent local activists whose critical voice cannot be ignored by local governments.

Syafiq also took the initiative to broaden networks at the regional and international level. Later, Rahima became involved in a project known as Rights at Home, which involved several non-government organizations in Southeast Asia, the Middle East and South Africa.

The project tried to explore women's issues from each region.

"The findings were diverse and resourceful," Syafiq said. "For example, domestic violence in the Middle East was largely motivated by religious stands, while in Indonesia it is more complex, with economic and social issues entangled."

Capacity-building for women activists from each region was

also achieved through training and workshops in Lebanon and South Africa.

The significance of the role of women during the era of Prophet Muhammad can be seen through their involvement in re-telling the hadits (Prophet's sayings) and in the establishment of early Islamic discourse, said Syafiq, adding that "some of them were also voluntarily involved in a war."

Several women's rights are protected by Islam; among these are the right to choose their marriage partner, to divorce, to inherit and possess property, to raise their children, to spend their own money, and the right to a decent life.

Unfortunately, after the death of the Prophet, the role of women in the public sphere declined and appreciation of women also plummeted, said Syafiq, who has been working for the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) as one of its gender advisers for the Agency of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Aceh-Nias from 2005.

Against the backdrop of the implementation of sharia in Aceh, Syafiq was involved in the program of strengthening the role of women ulama, who are underrepresented at almost every layer of society.

He said that he would write a book on his current involvement in Aceh.

As a young and progressive Islamic scholar, Syafiq is indeed a prolific writer.

His books include Menakar Harga Perempuan: Eksplorasi Lanjut atas Islam dan Hak-hak Reproduksi Perempuan (Weighing Women's `Price': Further Exploration of Islam and Women's Reproductive Rights) published by Mizan and The Asia Foundation (1998) and Kekerasan dalam Rumah Tangga (Domestic Violence) published by the Fatayat NU (1999).

Women's Leadership in Islam (editedrby him) was published by The Asia Foundation (1999) and Dari Aqidah ke Revolusi (From Aqidah to Revolution) by Paramadina (2003). His recent book written in English has been collaboratively published by Solstice, The Asia Foundation and the International Center for Islam and Pluralism, and is titled Understanding Women in Islam: An Indonesian Perspective.

Syafiq said his biggest dream is to spread an Indonesian interpretation of Islam which is moderate, humanistic and progressive throughout the world.

He vows to write more—not only in Bahasa Indonesia, but also in English.

"Some Islamic scholars from the Middle East might dismiss our version of Islam as they always regard themselves as more authoritative," said Syafiq.

"But we also have the right to interpret Islam in our way, to ensure that Islam brings peace and justice upon us and the universe, and takes a decisive side with marginalized sections of society—particularly women." •

First published by The Jakarta Post, November 4, 2006

Yusuf Surachman Djajadihardja: Predicting Earthquakes and Tsunamis

wo days after Pangandaran beach in West Java was hit by an earthquake, marine geologist Yusuf Surachman Djajadihardja was interviewed by a reporter from a national TV station.

"Pak Yusuf, can you predict where the next earthquake will strike?" asked the reporter.

"Probably in the waters off south Sumatra, the Sunda Strait, or in southern Java waters."

"Can you be more specific?"

"I think the Sunda Strait."

Within minutes the TV studio was being shaken. Later it was discovered that Sunda Strait was hit by an earthquake, sending tremors to Jakarta and surrounding areas.



That was a true story, and although it may have been a coincidence that the prediction was so accurate, Indonesia is undoubtedly going through a number of years of living dangerously, said Yusuf who is the Director of the Center of Technology for Natural Resource Inventory (P3TISDA) at the Agency for the Assessment and Application of Technology (BPPT).

In 1797, a massive 8.5 magnitude earthquake hit the Mentawai islands off Sumatra. Then, in 1815, Tambora volcano erupted in West Nusa Tenggara. In 1833, another earthquake struck Mentawai at a magnitude of between 8.7 and 9.0.

In 1861, an 8.5 magnitude earthquake occurred in Nias. And in 1883, the Krakatau volcano famously erupted.

In general, Yusuf said, Indonesia was rocked by massive earthquakes in 1350, 1600, 1797 and 1883, pointing to a certain cycle.

"So Indonesia is again undergoing a period of natural disasters in the 2000s," said Yusuf bluntly, during an interview with The Jakarta Post at his office on the 19th floor of the BBPT skyscraper.

He added that the Lapindo-mud disaster might also be an indication of the increased tectonic activity.

Earthquakes in this country are caused by a collision between the oceanic and continental crusts in the deep ocean, he said.

"But the tectonic zones in the eastern part of Indonesia and in the western part have different characteristics. In the western part, the Indo-Australia crust regularly collides with the Sumatra and Java plates, causing an oblique-subduction and creating what geologists call the Sumatra fault zone.

"And in the eastern part, the Australian plate is moving to the north, while simultaneously the Pacific plate is moving westward, squeezing the eastern part of Indonesia. These movements have resulted in a unique tectonic product," Yusuf depicted while gesturing and showing a simulation on his laptop.

So, will Australia and Indonesia eventually merge?

"Yes, but it's not as simple as that because there would be formation and deformation," said Yusuf.

Yusuf has been aware of the tsunami-prone areas since he joined an expedition conducted by the BPPT and the Japan Marine Science and Technology Center in 2002.

There were 15 researchers participating in the expedition including those from Trisakti University, the University of Indonesia, the Bandung Institute of Technology, Pertamina and the Institute for Marine and Fisheries Research (BRKP).

"I was praying, please God—show me the richness of nature that You have created, anything that has not been discovered," Yusuf recalled.

Using a Japanese submersible Shinkai 6500, piloted by two Japanese team members, Yusuf and select members of the team successfully discovered the Sumatra fault at a depth of about 2,000 meters.

"I was amazed, we were all speechless. And we have since found five similar areas where we can draw a line for geological mapping," said Yusuf.

It was revealed that the Sumatra fault doesn't stop at Sunda Strait, but continues to the southern part of Sukabumi, West Java, a further 300 kilometers.

"This means the fault's total length is approximately 2000 kilometers from Sabang to the southern part of the waters off West Java encompassing Banten province," said Yusuf.

Based on findings announced during a press conference, Dec. 27, 2004 at the office of the State Ministry of Research and Technology, one day after Aceh was entirely devastated by a powerful earthquake-triggered tsunami, Yusuf predicted that there was a possibility that a similar tsunami would also hit the waters south of West Java.

His statement drew anger from those in the tourism industry who feared a loss of tourist revenue. Some scientists also disagreed with his statement.

Nevertheless, three months later, Nias was rocked by an 8.7 magnitude earthquake. And one and a half years later,

Pangandaran beach was swamped by an earthquake-triggered tsunami, followed by another earthquake in Sunda Strait two days later.

Born Nov. 24, 1958 in Bandung, West Java, Yusuf first developed an interest in nature when he was still a young boy, skimming stones along the surface of a river in Bandung.

He received his undergraduate degree in geophysics and meteorology from the Bandung Institute of Technology in 1985. After completing his study, he was presented with the choices of joining Elnusa (then a sub-company of Pertamina) or the BPPT.

But he joined the latter in 1986 because "the building looked prestigious, it is located in the heart of Jakarta and I realized I would have good opportunities for further study."

After starting work, Yusuf shifted his specialization to marine geology. He was sent to Japan to continue his studies and completed both his masters and PhD in marine geology from Tokyo University in 1992 and 2003 respectively.

He said that two-thirds of Indonesia's sea is deep sea which has not been fully explored, adding that the deep sea has a lot of natural resource potential that can be used for the benefit of the nation, such as various minerals, oil, gas, and energy from methane hydrate.

Unfortunately, Indonesia has only six research ships; four owned by the BPPT and two by the Indonesian Research Institute (LIPI), "which are inadequate for a country as large as Indonesia."

Nevertheless, interest in research grew significantly after the catastrophe in Aceh, making many aware of the importance of marine geology and the vast potential and richness that the country's marine life offers.

Yusuf has been involved in various important research trips with international and national research institutes.

"And I would like to welcome more international researchers to collaborate with us, Indonesia's deep sea is a vast laboratory for curious researchers to discover," said Yusuf.

For example, the Java Trench is particularly intriguing because this is the deepest sea in Indonesia with a depth of 7,725 meters.

Some scientists predict that the area has 17.7 billion cubic meters of methane gas (CH4) which can be utilized as an alternative energy.

Yusuf, who is married to Rosita Gemala Hanum and has three children, has received awards from both the Marine and Fisheries Minister and the State Apparatus Minister for his devotion as a civil servant and achievements as a researcher respectively. And, he has had a fast rise through the civil servant ranks.

He was also awarded the Satyalancana Wira Karya Award from President Megawati Soekarnoputri for his dedication and a certificate from Jaya Suprana's Indonesia Record Museum (MURI) as the first Indonesian geologist to dive into the deep sea, both in 2003.

So, if Sumatra and Java are prone to earthquakes and the much-feared tsunami, where is the safest place in the country?

"Kalimantan island," quipped Yusuf, quickly adding that more research needs to be done to have more accurate geological mapping. •

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Habib Zarbaliyev: Promoting Indonesia In Azerbaijan

alk with Azerbaijan linguist Habib Zarbaliyev, and you will be astonished at his fluent Bahasa Indonesia.

This is despite the fact that he has visited Indonesia only twice, and never stayed in the country for long.

The first visit was in February 2002 for seven days, the second in July 2006 for a month.

So how does he practice his Indonesian?

"Using a mirror. I practice it in front of my mirror," he told The Jakarta Post during a conference titled Teaching Bahasa Indonesia to Speakers of Other Languages organized by Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University in Anyer, Banten, in July.

Many of the current generation in Azerbaijan may not know Indonesia well; because of this Zarbaliyev has been



working industriously via radio and TV programs to promote the archipelagic nation in his country, he said in a further recent interview via e-mail.

He said that people in his generation would associate Indonesia with Sukarno and still remember when the flamboyant president visited Muslim-populated Azerbaijan, which was still part of the former giant communist Soviet Union at the time.

Historically, Indonesia and the Soviet Union cemented strong relations, particularly at the peak of Sukarno's maneuver to flirt with the former communist superpower to counterbalance that of the West.

In the Soviet Union, Bahasa Indonesia was taught at Moscow University and St. Petersburg University. In 1965 after the alleged Communist coup, relations between the Soviet Union and Indonesia were scrapped, but Bahasa Indonesia was still taught at universities, Zarbaliyev said.

"There was even a course on Sukarno at the Indonesian history and philology programs of St. Petersburg University, which studied the speech and rhetoric of the first Indonesian president.

The lecturer was the late Prof. Pawel Movcanyuk. Sukarno generated a lot of respect from people here," he said.

"Sukarno's books Sarinah and Indonesia Menggugat (Indonesia Accuses) were also well known."

Zarbaliyev has been promoting Indonesia since 1976 through seminars, radio and TV programs. And when Azerbaijan, with its 8.5 million population, reestablished its independence in 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union, he promoted Indonesia more extensively.

As the only expert in Indonesian language and culture in the country, he took part in regular TV programs, held traditional Indonesian music and dance events, featured Indonesia's day-today lifestyle and culture and disseminated the works of Indonesian artists and cultural figures.

In 1994, he opened Indonesian program at Baku University,

where he is currently a professor in Bahasa Indonesia.

The students learn not only Bahasa Indonesia and all its grammatical and semantic aspects, but also the country's literature, geography, history, ethnography, politics and state administration.

Zarbaliyev translated the work of many contemporary Indonesian writers into the Azerbaijan language "in order to sow the seeds of love for Indonesian culture."

"Even Indonesian pantun has a similarity to that of Azerbaijan's in terms of their structure and genre," he said.

"Just like Indonesia's pantun, (traditional poetry) bayati (Azerbaijan's version of pantun) also contains philosophical thoughts, ethics and morality. Both bayati and pantun consist of four lines; the first two provide the reasoning for the last two," Zarbaliyev explained.

And since Azerebaijan is 93.4 percent Muslim, many Arabic expressions were absorbed into its language, he said.

Consequently, many similarities can be found in both Bahasa Indonesia and Azerbaijan language. They include legal terms, Islamic discourse, indications of time and many other matters.

"Students are therefore familiar with many of the terms," he said. In Azerbaijan language Arabic terms are somehow changed, phonetically, grammatically and semantically."

Full of admiration for Pramoedya Ananta Toer, whom he praised as the greatest literary icon Indonesia has ever had, Zarbaliyev said even Indonesian foreign minister Hassan Wirayudi was astonished at the fact there is an expert in Bahasa Indonesia in a country as far away as Azerbaijan.

Zarbaliyev met the minister during the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Azerbaijan last year.

Born September 1954 in Azerbaijan, after graduating from Azerbaijan State University, Zarbaliyev received a scholarship to study at the school of oriental studies at St Petersburg University in what was then the Soviet Union.

"Initially I studied Arabic, but I switched to Indonesian

language and literature after reading many short stories. I imagined a beautiful and exotic tropical country with a lot of islands," he recalled.

In 1985 he defended his PhD at the university with its thesis that compared Bahasa Indonesia with other languages. In 1994 he defended his second PhD in linguistics at the Institute of Language and Knowledge of Azerbaijan Academy and in 1998 was awarded a full professorship in the same subject area from the Institute of Social and Political Administration.

Zarbaliyev has written numerous scholarly works. These include Bahasa Mingkabau (monograph, 1987), Typology of the Construction of Word-Numbers (monograph, 1997), Anthology of Modern Indonesian Literature (book, 1997), and hundreds of scholarly and popular articles and reviews of Indonesian literature, culture, arts and tradition.

He has also translated a number of Indonesian short stories into Azerbaijan.

From 1982 to 2006 he participated in a number of international conferences in Bahasa Indonesia and other Austronesia languages, including research in Malaysia.

Since 2004 he has been working as a translator for international library Aliyev Heritage (http://www.aliyevheritage.com/).

Currently, his largest project is to write a 500-page book on Indonesia, which contains comprehensive information on Indonesian history, geography, literature, language, ethnography, culture, arts, economy and politics, he said.

Zarbaliyev, whose favorite Indonesian food is nasi goreng (fried rice), is married to Esmira Zarbaliyeva, an expert in Russian language. They have four children: Laura Zarbaliyeva, Rimal Zarbaliyev, Nihal Zarbaliyev and Nabiyee Zarbaliyeva.

Zarbaliyev said he started to introduce the beauty of the Indonesian language to his eldest daughter Laura while still young, so at the age of 13 she already aspired to become an expert in it.

Laura is currently in her last semester at Universitas Negeri

Yogyakarta, taking a Masters in Indonesian.

"I am thankful that my daughter received a scholarship from the Indonesian government," he said, adding that there are around 30 international students benefiting from scholarships, including his daughter in Yogyakarta.

Laura is the only student from Azerbaijan who has received a scholarship.

This means Indonesia still needs to work harder to promote Bahasa Indonesia, he said. He added that given its current strategic position, Indonesia has the potential to promote Bahasa Indonesia to become a prominent language in the region.

He said he and his daughter planned to establish a Bahasa Indonesia program at Azerbajian Language University as soon as she completes her studies.

"Padang State University has already declared its willingness to help us with books and the curriculum," said Zarbaliyev, who already has 400 books written in Bahasa Indonesia and 500 other books on Indonesia written in Russian, English, Dutch and German in his private library. The oldest was published in 1882.

Azerbaijan Central University has 500 books on Indonesia, all written in Russian.

Asked what he does when he has a longing for Indonesia, Zarbaliyev replied, "I listen to the songs of Broery Marantika and Hetty Koes Endang, or read the work of Pramoedya." •

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Mariam Alimi: Fighting for Afghan Women



ariam Alimi was only a two-year-old toddler when she and all members of her family secretly tried to escape from war-torn Afghanistan.

However, stories passed down by her parents and siblings told of many tragic events in a country torn by continuous foreign occupations and civil wars.

The occupation by the Soviet Union was met with strong resistance from many

Muslim Afghans. Mujahideen, financed by the U.S. in a bitter Cold War constellation, fought against what they considered the atheist forces.

"But both forces brought nothing but desperation to many Afghans," Alimi told The Jakarta Post during a recent study tour organized by the International Center of Islam and Pluralism in Cirebon, West Java.

She added that one of her uncles was forced to become a child soldier to fight against the Soviet forces with the Mujahideen.

"Many youngsters were recruited, often against their will, for the war effort," said Alimi, who was born on Jan. 15, 1982, in Kabul. She has two other siblings. Her father, a sound engineer whose career and dreams in the film industry were shattered by the war, decided that he and all members of his family had to escape their beloved country if they really wished their children to grow up free from fear.

As war ravaged the country, she said education was simply not available at the time.

They escaped, therefore, to Pakistan en route to the U.S.

Paying a large amount of money to some people who helped them escape, the family was hidden among a pile of goods for trade in a truck.

"We would have been killed or raped if Soviet soldiers had found us," said Alimi, recalling what her mother told her about the painful and scary journey to freedom.

Approximately three million Afghan refugees settled in Pakistan. The Soviet occupation resulted in a mass exodus of over five million Afghans who moved into refugee camps in neighboring Pakistan and Iran.

After a year in Pakistan, the family was granted asylum and was sent to the U.S. to lead a new life.

Following years of struggle, her family managed to buy a pizza restaurant in Greensboro, North Carolina, and has been running it ever since.

But Alimi cries at what has taken place in her home country.

Afghanistan was plunged into civil war and warlordism after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the loss of approximately 15,000 Soviet soldiers.

"The Taliban, who came to power in 1996, was initially welcomed by many Afghans as they promised stability," she said, "but they eventually applied strict sharia law and as a result many people, including my cousins, were barred from going to school or getting jobs."

The Taliban imposed the law ruthlessly, including the stoning to death and severing of hands for what they considered religious violations.

"Soccer stadiums became a venue for executions, usually watched by cheering spectators," she said of a harrowing experience her cousins shared with her.

Besides being barred from school and work, women were obliged to wear the burka, which covers them fully from head to foot.

Radio and television were considered haram (prohibited) and the equipment was destroyed, she added.

By the fall of 1998 the Taliban had taken over about 90 percent of the country and, with its human rights violations and scorchedearth policies, had transformed itself into an international pariah.

What has occurred in her country has bolstered Alimi's sense of humanity. "I thought that I had to do something so what has happened in my homeland would not be repeated elsewhere," she said.

"I was a school teacher in biology, but after further thought I made a switch to international relations."

She took a Masters degree in that subject at Syracuse University, New York, and completed it in 2005 with a thesis titled Al-Qaeda, from bin Laden to Zarqawi: A Study of a Terror Network.

It was written against the backdrop of the war on terror led by the U.S. After the Sept. 11 terror attack, the Taliban, which allegedly had strong relations with al-Qaeda, fell under military attack by the U.S. and its Northern Alliance over its refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden.

Her thesis also reveals how women suffered greatly from what she perceived as narrow-minded Taliban policies and the terror network it established.

During her period of study, Alimi worked as an intern with the United Nations in Austria, Vienna. The job became an eyeopener for Alimi on human catastrophes in many parts of the world, particularly the suffering of women.

She has also traveled extensively to many countries, both developed and developing, to carry out comparative studies.

Determined that her sense of humanity needs to be translated into concrete work, Alimi joined the Academy for Educational Development (AED), a 45-year-old, Washington-based non-governmental organization (NGO) that has served in more than 150 countries around the world.

She is now with the Center for Civil Society and Governance of the AED, which focuses on three areas: human rights advocacy, peace-building programs and NGO capacity-building.

Alimi has been involved in a number of projects. Under the umbrella of human rights advocacy, she became involved in the India-based Sari Equity Project; it focused on women's empowerment in South Asia and ended last October.

Also, the Bangladesh Human Rights Advocacy Program, which aimed to strengthen human rights and the improvement of women's living conditions through the involvement of thousands of imams (Islamic religious leaders) in Bangladesh.

Under the peace-building program, Alimi got involved in conflict resolution in African countries, which was aimed at bringing peace to tribes in conflict, empowering religious leaders and fighting against human trafficking.

She said that Indonesia could become a model of a moderate Muslim country with constructive gender development.

"The Bangladesh imams are here to learn more about Indonesia's moderate Islam, particularly about how religious leaders and NGOs collaborate to improve the cause of women and the fight against the trafficking of women and children," she said.

She was referring to the seven imams from Bangladesh whom she accompanied during a study tour to Indonesia, also in collaboration with Dhaka-based NGO Uddipan.

Asked about what she thinks about the democratic atmosphere that she experienced during her stay in the U.S., Alimi said she was thankful that she had the opportunity to further her studies, regardless of her origin and religion.

Asked what she thinks about the current situation in her home

country and what she would do to contribute to helping improve conditions there, she said: "I'm relieved that the situation is getting better after the Northern Alliance finally toppled the radical and conservative Taliban in 2001.

"I look forward to working on a humanitarian program there to empower fellow Afghan women who have suffered from Taliban bigotry; to help them escape from poverty and backwardness, give them access to education and let them stand on their own feet," Alimi said.

She also added that many from the Afghan diaspora have gone back to Afghanistan as stability gradually returned. •

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Adrianus Meliala: Pushing for Reform of Indonesian Police

sked about the progress of police reform in Indonesia, criminologist and police analyst Adrianus Eliasta Sembiring Meliala said that it was obvious, but the direct benefit for citizens would not be realized in one night.

"This is because police reform takes place in three interrelated and complex domains: structural, instrumental and cultural. Policing activities have not been practically touched by the reform," said Adrianus during an interview with The Jakarta Post at the Institute of Police Science (PTIK), where he teaches as a part time lecturer.

"Structurally, we have tried to position the police away from the military. The police are now under the President, no longer the military. But this is a compromise, not the ideal position," he said.



He explained that, ideally, the police should be under a political or ministerial institution, "because there should be a manager to whom the police would be accountable. Currently Indonesia's Police chief has a conflict of interest: he is the one who lays out policy but is also the one who executes it."

He added, however, that this was still better than before, when the police were under the military.

He explained that in the curriculum, all militaristic approaches have been scrapped. For example, the military shooting style has been replaced by one for the police.

"In the military, you get the highest score if you can shoot the head of the enemy, but under police shooting style you'll get the highest score for the feet. In the police you shoot to cripple, not to kill," he argued.

In recruiting new members, a new approach has also been adopted. "We are not looking for cold, hard personalities as in the military, but socially helpful personalities with an honest and warm attitude."

A new work culture has also been introduced, "Ten years ago you would need to undergo massive security check just to enter this police education complex, but not now, right?" he said.

The new recruitment approach with psychological testing was introduced earlier this year, meaning there were all together around 8,000 new students from two semesters of recruitment by the State Police School (SPN). The curriculum was also introduced just four years ago.

"We predict that by 2011 all new approaches with a new generation of personalities will be fully in place," said Adrianus, who has just been awarded a professorship in criminology from the University of Indonesia where he serves as a full-time lecturer.

His speech during his professorship inauguration was titled State Crimes: Some Lessons from Indonesia.

He said he chose the topic because attention has been given too much to personal and individual crimes, while state crimes

tend to be overlooked.

"The political legitimacy of the state doesn't prevent the state from committing crimes. Often, people don't realize that they have become victims of state crimes because of the state's political legitimacy," he said, warning of the danger of state crimes.

Asked if the murder of human rights activist Munir was an example of a state crime, he said: "In Munir's case, the state committed two crimes: first the failure of the state to protect its citizens; second, its failure to resolve the case thoroughly."

He added that the tragedy also clearly indicated a flaw in the work performance of the police.

Born Sept. 28, 1966, Adrianus was only in the third year of elementary school when his father, a career attorney, passed away, leaving behind a wife and three young children.

"My mother vowed to raise her children alone; she refused to remarry," said Adrianus, the eldest in the family.

"But life was hard; many members of our family left us alone to struggle for a new life. Many regarded us as liability, so my mother declared that it was our own responsibility to raise up our family's social status, and only through education could we can pursue that."

Adrianus spent his time from kindergarten to senior high school at a Catholic-oriented Bunda Hati Kudus education institution.

"My mother was so preoccupied with selling food in our neighborhood to earn a living, she entrusted her children's education to this disciplined, tough Catholic education institution," he said, adding that he invited his former teachers to his professorship inauguration.

He also opted, pragmatically, to study criminology at the University of Indonesia. "As criminology was not that attractive, so the competition to be accepted was not too great. The most important thing for me was to study at a state university where the tuition fees were low. I didn't want to burden my mother any further."

Nevertheless, it turned out that he made the right decision and that he fell in love further with the subject he had chosen.

He received his Masters in Social Psychology from the University of Indonesia in 1994 with a thesis titled Judgmental Factors on Corruption as Behavior, and in Legal and Criminological Psychology from Manchester Metropolitan University, the UK, in 1995 with thesis titled Anxieties Having Students in Manchester (sic), and a PhD in Criminology from the University of Queensland, Australia, in 2004 with thesis titled Sensitive Policing: Indonesia's Case.

Adrianus, who once also worked as a journalist at Editor news magazine for two and a half years, teaches at various institutions.

These include the University of Indonesia, the Institute of Police Science, Atmajaya Catholic University, Satya Nagara University, YAI University and Jayabaya University.

He also served as an expert advisor to the Indonesian Police chief from 2001 to 2006.

A prolific writer, Adrianus has produced 12 books that he either wrote or edited, and numerous scholarly articles in both national and international journals, including popular pieces in the national media.

Adrianus is married to Maria Regina Rosari Br. Ginting. They have four children, three of which have survived.

He said that people need to be patient on law enforcement, "Because the police often need to consider social justice, not just legal justice."

He gave as an example the case of domestic violence. "The police need to consider fully many factors before taking legal action because of the social impact that could spill over onto the children and other members of the family.

"That is why nonlegal settlement is usually offered as the fist option when the police are faced with such cases. But the police will often then be accused of acting partially—of putting aside legal justice."

Nonetheless, when cases move up to the attorney office, usually legal consideration is fully held, "and people will complain of the lack of social justice," he said of the acute dilemma.

He also said that street justice, which sees petty criminals beaten to death, is not merely caused by the lack of trust of people toward law enforcement, "It relates to wider, nonlegal issues, such as the dynamics of the development of urban societies, in which police still lack the knowledge and skills to deal with often fast-changing societal behavior."

Asked about the biggest obstacle to police reform in Indonesia, he said: "The military set a bad example to the police over its refusal to be put under the civilian control of the Ministry of Defense. So some sections in the police started to grumble, 'Hey, we have gone too far with reform!"

He cited an example that the police have tried some of their high-ranking officers such as three-star generals Suwitno Landung and Ismuko over alleged corruption; conversely, not even a onestar general in the military has been tried.

"Look at the alleged corruption over the transformation of Kostrad and the case of the late Brigadier General Koesmayadi, who allegedly collected a large amount of weapons. These cases were swept under the carpet, discouraging the police to undergo further reform." •

First published by The Jakarta Post, December 8, 2006

Husein Muhammad: Determined to Combat The Trafficking of Women



usein Muhammad might be a rather slim Muslim cleric, but his boldness and burning determination cannot be overlooked and are clearly on display when he talked about the degrading conditions under which many women still live here.

"The country might have been liberated from colonialism, but its women have not been,"

Husein told The Jakarta Post in Cirebon, West Java.

"Restrictions on women's activities and aspirations occur because of the unbalanced relations between women and men. Men always regard themselves as superior—stronger than women with regard to dignity, knowledge and physical condition."

He said that this happens not only because of local tradition and culture, but also mistaken and rigid interpretation of religious texts, which reinforced local tradition and culture to subjugate women.

"The essence and spirit of Islam is justice, so interpretation of Islam should always prioritize this, regardless of the time and place we live in," he argued.

"It is because of this that the interpretation of religious texts is always multidimensional. We should regard the Koran as a lantern in our lives, but rigid interpretation casts aside the timeless spirit of humanity that is deeply enshrined within Islam."

Husein, who has been advocating women's rights for almost 13 years, said that the term "gender" is still alien to many clerics. Some even suspect that the movement and campaign to improve women's condition is an attempt to promote Western values that are perceived to have the potential to distort Islamic values.

He said that many clerics are of the opinion that gender differences, as with sexual differences, are unchangeable.

He explained that their opinion is inseparable from how they comprehend the classical texts, hadis (guidance for understanding religious queries) and fiqh (study of laws pertaining to ritual obligations), "yet many hadis that appear to be discrediting women need to be methodologically revisited."

He cited one hadis from HR al-Turmudzi, which he said had the meaning: "I bequeath to you, so that you do good to women, because they often become the targets of abuse among you, although you are obliged to do good to them."

Many verses in the Koran also carry the spirit of humanity and urge equal treatment between humans.

He said that one of the problems in campaigning for gender awareness is the lack of religious knowledge among many women Indonesian activists.

"In the 1980s, those who raised awareness of gender equality usually blamed religion as the cause of oppression of women, thereby squarely laying the blame at the feet of clerics.

"Regrettably, these activists had an inadequate knowledge of Islam, so their movement provoked a negative reaction from many clerics."

Born May 9, 1953, Husein Muhammad spent his youth studying religion deeply at Pesantren Lirboyo Islamic boarding school in Kediri, and finished in 1973. He later continued his studies at Al-Azhar University in Egypt (1983) and the Institute of Koranic Science (PTIQ) in Jakarta (1980).

His scholarly works include Fiqh Perempuan: Syarh Uqud Al-Luzam (Fiqh on women), Islam agama Ramah Perempuan (Islam is a religion that is friendly to women), Spirit Kualitas Kemanusiaan (The spirit of quality for humanity), Dawrah Fiqh on Women, and Fiqh Anti-Trafficking.

Realizing that his efforts need to be more institutionalized, together with activists Affandi Mokhtar, Marzuki Wahid and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, Husein helped establish the Fahmina Institute in November 2000 in Cirebon.

It is a not-for-profit, non-government organization concerned with the study of religion and society and strengthening of the community. It has an ethnically, ideologically and geographically diverse membership.

The vision of the Fahmina Institute is to realize a civil society that is critical in its thinking, open in its attitudes, powerful in its dignity and just in the way it regulates and orders people's lives.

Activities include community organization training, efforts to abolish corruption and abuse of position or power, the improvement of regional policy control regarding women and impoverished communities, advocacy for free and high-quality education, bolstering the capacity of women and combating women-and child-trafficking.

Husein said women-trafficking is a delicate problem in Indonesia. The Indonesian Migrant Workers Consortium (KOPBUMI) reported that about 1.5 million Indonesian migrant workers are victims of human trafficking.

Approximately 700,000 to one million Indonesian migrant workers are exploited as sexual workers and in other degrading jobs. The most serious cases occur mostly in West and East Java, particularly Cirebon and Indramayu.

Husein regretted that many victims are "criminalized" by society, and added that it was the responsibility of society to combat human trafficking. Husein has received an award from the U.S. government for these efforts.

Nonetheless, Husein's noble efforts are not without challenges. Last May, the hard-line Forum Ukhuwah Islamiah (FUI) sealed the office of the Fahmina Institute. The group accused the organization of being a Western puppet that works to a hidden Western hidden agenda to destroy Islam.

The group put up a poster with offensive words on the window of the office.

"They even said that my blood is halal. I don't feel intimidated, but my colleagues are. I'm safe enough due to my authoritative position as a cleric," said Husein, who is also a leader of Pesantren Dar el-Tauhid Arjawinangun in Cirebon.

"I also have to face challenges from other prominent clerics, but thanks to my social status as a cleric they don't dare to confront me directly. They merely persuade people not to follow my teaching."

In spite of this, Husein vowed to continue his struggle.

"More and more women are now benefiting from a quality education, so why not give them a dignified chance to contribute to the development of this country?" he challenged. •

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George Junus Aditjondro: Standing by The Country's Marginalized

ne might never have imagined that one of the most critical and anti-New Order academic and social activists, George Junus Aditjondro, met with president Soeharto at the invitation of the latter at a solemn ceremony at Merdeka Palace in 1987.

"I was presented with the Kalpataru award for my efforts to encourage various environmental organizations to become an environmental watchdog," recalled George.

"At the time the tactical alliance between the government and non-governmental organizations, which were mostly environmentally oriented, was solid. This is because then state minister of the environment Emil Salim felt the need to strengthen the role of his ministry, and therefore it needed 'legs' in society."



"So, we needed each other. We needed recognition so that we had room to move freely, and the minister needed us to expand its influence throughout the country."

However, the alliance began to crack when the three serious environmental cases of Kedungombo dam in Central Java, Indo Rayon (North Sumatra) and Scott Paper (Papua) appeared to have gone beyond certain limits, and George was increasingly sidelined as his criticism of the cases did not make everyone happy.

George was born on May 27, 1946, in Pekalongan to a Javanese father and Dutch mother. His father was educated in Holland for nine years and was also a student activist of the Indonesian Association (PI) as a secretary to Mohammad Hatta, the latter subsequently becoming the first vice president of Indonesia.

He said his father married a Dutch woman before coming home to Pekalongan to establish a law firm. But he didn't stay long as a lawyer and decided to work as a head of state court.

George said that at the time it was the peak of the fighting between the colonial Dutch and Indonesia, and their home was a place for secret meetings of independence fighters like Hoegeng and Ali Moertopo.

"My father was a head of state court and his wife was Dutch, so the Dutch never suspected our activities," recalled George. "Simultaneously, my mother also engaged in counterespionage to benefit the independence struggle."

Living in Holland when he was very young, George went to elementary school in three cities, Banyuwangi, Pontianak and Makassar, as he followed his father's tours of court duty. In Makassar his father was promoted to become a member of high state court and participated in the opening of the law and social sciences school at Hasanuddin University.

"Although I am biologically Javanese, I am culturally more eastern than western Indonesian because, during my formative years as a young man, I lived in Makasar from junior high until 1964 when I started college at the Hasanuddin engineering school."

"I experienced the tense situation when a war between DI/TII (Darul Islam/Islamic Indonesian Army) and the Indonesian Military took place until the rebel leader, Kahar Muzakar, was assassinated," he said.

George added that the situation was relatively normal until the alleged coup in 1965 by the communists, which forced his family to move back to Semarang. So he went to the state technical academy in the city and also studied electronic engineering at Satya Wacana Christian University in Salatiga. He never finished either.

"An IQ test later revealed that I'm more a socially oriented than a mathematical person; my sense of social justice was very much inherited from my father," George told The Jakarta Post during the launching of an edited book titled Revitalisasi Kearifan Lokal: Studi Resolusi Konflik di Kalimantan Barat, Maluku dan Poso (Revitalization of Local Wisdoms: Conflict Resolution Studies in West Kalimantan, Maluku and Poso) at Bumi Wiyata Hotel, Depok, West Java.

George, who contributes a chapter on the Poso conflict in the book, looked fresh and fit during an interview conducted early in the morning. He added his commitment to stand by the marginalized was bolstered by his father's principle that, despite his aristocratic blood, his father was very much against feudalism. His appreciation of culture was inherited from his mother.

George was fully active as a student journalist at Kami daily and at influential Indonesian Student Journalist Association (IPMI). He later became a journalist at Tempo news magazine from 1971 to 1979. He helped journalist Fikri Jufri at the business desk before becoming an editor for technology and the environment. Being a journalist, he was acquainted with many environmental and agricultural activists.

After 10 years at Tempo, George decided to dedicate himself to the empowerment of agricultural communities, so he helped establish the Rural Guidance Secretariat with Bambang Ismawan, Prof. Sayogo and Abdullah Sarwani. He also helped set up

environmental watchdog WALHI and worked for the Societal Development Foundation of Irian Jaya (YPMD-Irja) from 1981 to 1989.

Because his father's specialization was in agricultural law, as an activist George benefited a lot from many of his father's books. His role in nurturing environmental awareness was considered so significant that then president Soeharto presented to him the Kalpataru environmental award in 1987.

George further won a scholarship to study for a Master of Science degree at Cornell University in the U.S. with a thesis on the educational process of the societal development in YPMD-Irja, which he completed in 1991. He later continued with research for a PhD and completed it in 1993 from the same university with a thesis on public education on the impact of the development of Kedungombo dam, Central Java.

Nonetheless, George's unremitting criticism of injustice in East Timor, his stand against the Army's dual function and the business interests of the Soeharto family were more than enough to cause severe deterioration of his relations with the New Order regime.

To protest what he considered intolerable injustice perpetrated by the state, he returned the Kalpataru award to the government.

After being interrogated by the authorities several times, George had a chance to escape the country in 1995 and taught at Murdoch University and the University of Newcastle in Australia and became a self-exiled person in the neighboring country.

He returned to Indonesia after the collapse of the New Order and now works as a research consultant at Yayasan Tanah Merdeka in Palu, Central Sulawesi, where he feels more at home, despite his Javanese origin.

Asked about the role of local wisdoms in mitigating conflict in Indonesia, particularly in Poso, he said that the way the government utilized traditional instruments could backfire if they were not conducted properly. He cited an example of the motambu tana tradition in Poso where the involved parties are required to eat the meat of a sacrificed buffalo, preceding the peace agreement.

"But President Abdurrahman Wahid missed that important element of the tradition as he, instead, left the ceremony without eating the meat," said George, who also teaches Marxism at Sanata Dharma University in Yogyakarta.

His Poso-born wife is currently studying for a doctorate in the city.

George warned that traditional instruments might likewise instead develop into authoritarian tools when local leaders are lured to manipulate them to impose their will on society, and to segregate societies by declaring that people who are not from their group are outsiders.

"So the best thing to deal with communal conflicts is to have a synthesis between traditional and contemporary approaches," George argued. He added that local wisdoms are further challenged by linguistic and religious transformation of society, and that identifying the most responsible culprits for the continuation and escalation of conflicts was something that should not be forgotten.

Therefore, exposing alliances between politically connected corporations and some elements of the military, which he said has marginalized and victimized local people in conflict areas, was also vital. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, January 9, 2007

Anwar Ibrahim: Optimist of Freedom and Democracy



remember the black eye Anwar Ibrahim received from a policeman, which was caught on camera and beamed around the world. The scene unfolded when the then deposed Malaysian deputy prime minister was walking into court on Sept. 29, 1998 for the alleged crime of sodomy and corruption.

But the event and his subsequent imprisonment at Sungai Buloh Penitentiary went beyond a mere black eye: "The

incident was also an eye-opener for my country, for all Malaysians, that injustice was an acute problem in this country," Ibrahim, who describes himself as a liberal and democrat, recently told The Jakarta Post.

In the midst of the 1997 economic crisis, Ibrahim—who supported free market principles—campaigned for greater accountability and rejected handing government bail-outs to politically connected companies. He also severely cut government expenditure in mega projects and introduced the controversial Anti-Corruption Legislation as acting prime minister.

All these moves are believed to have displeased then prime minister Mahathir Mohamad. Ibrahim was sacked and was imprisoned under what many believed to be a fabricated conviction.

Ibrahim was finally released in 2004, but is still barred from running for office until 2008. He is presently advisor to the People's Justice Party, of which his wife Dr. Wan Azizah is president.

Born on Aug. 10, 1947 in Cherok Tok Kun, Penang, Ibrahim is known for his student activism. Today, he is seen as a prominent advocate of the "Asian Renaissance" and a leading proponent of greater cooperation among nations. He is also passionate about Shakespeare, and his favorite singers are Asha Bhosle and Latta Manggeskar.

During a recent interview with the Post at Kenyir Lakeview Resort in Terengganu, Malaysia, Ibrahim shared his views on freedom of expression, justice, democracy, multiculturalism, interfaith dialog, economy and problems faced by Muslims around the world and in Malaysia.

Question: If you became prime minister, would you relax restrictions on the Malaysian press?

Answer: The issue of prime minister has to be decided by Malaysians and also be dealt within the party. However, the position of the opposition is very clear that the media must be free from government's control. In Mahathir's era, the media freedom index was 150; now we are a few points worse.

Would you also abrogate the repressive Internal Security Act?

We (The People's Justice Party) oppose not only the ISA, but also all draconian laws, all restriction on the media, students and unions. The present government (under Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi) might be a bit more relaxed than that of Mahathir, but all repressive laws are still in place.

How do you assess multiculturalism in your country, and what is the progress of the interfaith dialog that you initiated?

We have initiated a number of interfaith discussions at the civil society level, and I am encouraged that all the meetings and forums that we conducted were well attended. The deliberation was frank and there was a willingness and readiness to support a reform agenda for freedom, for respect of religion, for tolerance and against any form of extremism.

We are not for challenging other faiths, but for understanding and having the humility to learn and accept others. The politics of engagement would moderate even the fundamentalists.

Unfortunately, the government refuses to engage in a public discourse on these issues, and our national media is in a total blackout on this kind of news.

Actually, the issue is not merely extremists as alleged, but also the incompetence of the government to grasp the issue. Like the government apparatus arresting a couple on the street. This has nothing to do with fundamentalism and extremism; this is a total hypocrisy because the government allows all of the excesses of corrupt practices among the rich or the ruling clique, but harass young couples on the street.

You have mentioned that you are a consensus builder and you allow open debate within the members of the People's Justice Party. Do you give your personal stand on strategic issues?

I actually listen a lot, and indeed I would give my personal views on important issues

So what is your personal view on Muslims converting to different religions?

This is not really a big issue. It affects only a very few individuals, and not only among practicing Muslims in the first place. I think we have to be a bit farfetched to use this as criteria for general Muslims converting to Christianity or Hinduism or

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others. We have to mold the discussion with better understanding of some specific issues.

Under Malaysian rules, if you want to convert to Islam, you have to go to a (specific) religious court.

So this is not a public decision, not a governmental decision, it is an individual decision that needs to be discussed with religious authority that he or she endorsed at the first place.

How would you lure non-Muslims to become members of the People's Justice Party?

There are quite a substantial number of non-Muslim party leaders and followers; you know there are Chinese and Indians ... many of them are Christians. And one of the vice presidents of the party is Lee Boon Chye, a famous Chinese surgeon.

If you become prime minister and you replace the New Economic Policy with Malaysian New Economic Agenda, wouldn't you fear being left behind by Malay Muslim constituents?

Well, this issue is being debated by Muslims as well—or the Malays. The policy has benefited certain parts of the Malays—it has been abused.

We have UMNO (United Malays National Organization) leaders using this (policy) to enrich themselves, while a vast majority of the Malays themselves are being marginalized.

So we ask the Malays, why do you need this agenda? The new agenda, of course, would not marginalize the poor, of which the majority are Malay, but we would encourage all Malaysians—Chinese, Indians—to fully participate in the economic process.

We have made it clear that dismantling this New Economic Policy and replacing it with the Malaysian New Economic Agenda—which is more competitive, more vibrant—will attract more foreign investment, is able to rid the country of corruption which is endemic, is able to rid the country of cronyism... we have

evidence that government contracts are benefiting ministers and their family members and cronies directly.

What do you think of problems faced by Muslims around the world, particularly in Malaysia?

Of course, many of them are enraged by the policy of the West, particularly the United States under this administration of Bush. It is very difficult for them to see a just resolution of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians; we see this unending battle in Afghanistan and continuing occupation of Iraq. This has caused a lot of anxiety among Muslims.

But we have to deal with this and that, notwithstanding our disagreements with some of the foreign policy prescribed by the U.S. We must remain in a moderate voice and promote understanding.

The restrictions on you will be officially lifted in 2008; are you optimistic?

I will always be an optimist. Otherwise, I would not have survived in jail. •

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Surin Pitsuwan: Bridge Between East and West



prominent Muslim intellectual Surin Pistuwan was raised in a family with strong Islamic values. So when he was awarded an American Field Service Program scholarship to the United States, members of his Islamic community had to debate whether or not to let him go.

Some elders on the pondok (Islamic boarding school) council run

by his family immediately called for a meeting. Since Pitsuwan was the first son of the pondok's guru (teacher), and hence destined to inherit the pondok, some elders feared he would lose his Islamic values, while other, more moderate elders lent him their support.

Pitsuwan said, in an interview with The Jakarta Post, that his departure was a lonely and dramatic one, but he felt he had to go "in order to make a difference".

These days, no one in Pitsuwan's community should regret his decision. Pitsuwan has become a rare and respectable leader groomed from within Buddhist-majority Thailand's Muslim minority.

An eloquent speaker, Pitsuwan said absolute truth belongs only to God, and no human being has the right to claim it.

"During my time studying at the pondok, my teacher always ended class by saying Waullahu alam (Only God knows), as he solemnly closed the Koran under the lantern," recalled Pitsuwan, who was a prolific columnist for the National Review and the Bangkok Post throughout the 1980s.

Born in 1949, Pitsuwan studied at Thammasart University, Thailand, and graduated in 1972 in political science from Claremont Men's College, California. He later worked as a researcher between 1977 and 1980 at the Thai Studies Institute and the Ford Foundation.

He received his Ph.D from Harvard University in 1982, before working at the office of U.S. Democratic Congresswoman Geraldine A. Ferraro.

Pitsuwan was elected to the Thai parliament for the first time in 1986. He served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1992 and 1995, and as Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1997 and 2001.

Still charming and energetic at 58, Pitsuwan is not only a top intellectual and longtime politician; he is also a man who is aware of how to pose for the cameras.

"No, don't take a picture against the sun, our faces will darken," he warned during a recent photo session with enthusiastic participants at a workshop organized by the Institute of Policy Research and the Saskawa Peace Foundation in Terengganu, Malaysia, on the sidelines of which he gave this interview to the Post.

Pitsuwan shared his views on Thailand's unexpected military coup and the prospect of restoring democracy in its aftermath. He also discussed the project of building peace in Thailand's Muslimmajority south, and how to enhance relations between Thailand and Indonesia.

Do you see the coup as a setback to democracy in Thailand?

The coup was necessary when it took place. It was supported by the people on the condition that it move the country forward and that it only be for one year. Based on that condition, the country is hoping that we will return to the path of democracy as soon as possible. Our role is to make sure that this is short and painless. We are working on to encourage the new leaders to move forward, and to get out of the way soon. Was (the coup) a step forward? No it was not. But it was a corrective measure, and unfortunately it was unconstitutional. Nobody is trying to defend this, but only asking observers to understand the reasons why it had to come to that, because all avenues to a resolution of political conflict had been closed.

How are people going to push for a return to democracy, given that fact that Thailand no longer enjoys press freedom?

It is not going to be easy to take away press freedom. It would cost the new leadership support. And they are beginning to realize that... there is a sense of insecurity, but they are learning the lesson that they should not interfere quite fast. It is very risky when you close the (democratic) process... (if you) limit the process, then you are bound to agitate people and make mistakes. I think Thai society has gone too far for that kind of imposition of control.

Do you think that peace agreement in Aceh will have an impact on peace building measures in Muslim-populated Southern Thailand, since there was an alleged link between the Pattani insurgency and former separatists in Aceh?

It was not very well established that there was any connection between those two, but I think it depends on the government in Bangkok. Certainly... after a long time in Aceh you were able to come to a peace agreement. I think it was achieved because of the give-and-take and flexibility of both sides, which would have to be the ingredients of peace process in Thailand too... acceptable conditions that lead to real justice and space for everyone culturally and economically. I think that is the guiding principle.

Do you think that the present government is more eager than the previous one to deal appropriately with the insurgency in southern Thailand?

I think the present government has the right attitude, the

right direction and is more willing to engage in more dialog, use more peaceful means and open for more interaction than just the brute force (which) under (former Thai Prime Minister) Thaksin had been the wrong approach from the beginning, creating more problems and alienation... Nonetheless, it will take some time to make real contributions. The problem has gone too far... it requires a lot of effort on the part of so many people and institutions to bring back confidence.

What do you think the people in the south should do to benefit from the present government's attitude?

Well, I think the truth needs to be established. The present government has now admitted that the real issues are the injustices of the past, and who should be held responsible. Also we have to concentrate on the benefits of development rather than exploiting natural resources. So people (in the south) need to be part and parcel of the development process... and have access to political decision making. Thereby their traditions and culture will have to be a part of policy formulation in the future.

What areas of cooperation need to be enhanced between Indonesia and Thailand?

Economic investment is important. (Indonesia's) natural resources are extremely rich and Thailand is industrializing more and more and needs some of these resources. For example, fishery is one area we are looking into. Energy is forever a necessary item, tourism between us is also central. I think the basis of all this will be cultural exchanges to enhance the cultural commonalities between our two countries. •

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Hasbollah Toisuta: Removing the Seeds of Conflict in Maluku



of the Malino II agreement, peace seems to have prevailed in Ambon and its surrounds. But for Muslim scholar Hasbollah Toisuta, the seeds of conflict remain intact.

"We still use terminology like senior high school SMU I for Muslims and SMUK for Christians, depending on the location of the school. Thus, instead of helping produce a blue print for peace, our

education further segregates students," Hasbollah said.

"From a cultural perspective, we should be able to take off our 'jackets', and think together within the frame of Maluku," he said.

Hasbollah, a lecturer at the State Islamic University (STAIN) Ambon, was one of the signatories to the 2002 Malino II Agreement that put an end to the bloody religious conflicts that killed over 2,000 people since 1999

"Maluku doesn't belong to any particular group, it belongs to all of us," he stressed..

At the peak of the conflicts in 1999 and 2000, when the word 'peace' was often taboo in the province, Hasbollah stood up against his own people and protected many who his fellow Muslims saw as enemies.

Hasbollah regularly preached messages of peace at Friday prayers at Ambon's grand mosque al-Fatah, particularly on the importance of Ambon maintaining its pluralistic society and the need to forge reconciliation between Muslims and Christians.

Predictably, members of the notorious ultra-radical Laskar Jihad were not happy. His peace messages were immediately countered by Laskar's preachers, who also used the mosque's stage to call for an all-out war against their perceived enemies.

Laskar Jihad members at one point barred Hasbollah from coming up to the stage, replacing him with their own preacher, to the dismay of mosque authorities. Laskar's members also pressed the mosque's imam, KH Ahmad Bantam, to take Hasbollah off the preacher's list.

"Later, they came to my house to intimidate me, but with the support of the imam I vehemently said 'no' to them," Hasbollah told The Jakarta Post at his house in Kebon Cengkeh, Ambon.

Born on Jan . 29, 1966 in Siri-Sori, Saparua, Hasbollah graduated from the Syari'ah Faculty at the State Islamic Institute IAIN Alaudin Ambon in 1991. He received his masters' degree from the IAIN Alaudin Makassar, South Sulawesi in 2000.

Hasbollah said the spirit of brotherhood amongst Maluku people is traditionally very strong, but "incompatible policies from Jakarta and provocation from outside such as from radical groups and members of the security forces fueled the 1999 conflict."

He cited as an example the New Order regimes's land-oriented development policy, which was not suitable for Maluku's maritime economy.

"As a result, Maluku's fishermen remain in a backwater, with no appropriate skills to enhance the quality of their lives," Hasbollah said.

Hasbollah believes Maluku is rich with local wisdom that can be utilized to help nurture peace, such as the pela and gandong traditions. Pela is based on friendship between two villages, while gandong indicates brotherhood between two or more villages based on genealogical links.

"For example, the pela of my village, Siri-Sori, is Haria, which is a Christian village. When one of the villages conducted a social event, people from the other village were obliged to come and help," Hasbollah recalled.

"So when our brothers and sisters from Haria came, they were allowed to take any fruit from our yard. We shared joy together."

Asked if such local wisdom is still relevant today, after changes in the composition of Maluku society, Hasbollah said that concept of pela can also be applied to forge relations with migrants, such as Buton people.

"In the past, it (pela) was for Maluku people, however, now we can rejuvenate the concept to be applied to people who have migrated from outside Maluku," he explained.

Active in several students' and social organizations, broadminded and tolerant Hasbollah is not alien to the idea of pluralism as he maintains fine relations with many of Christian figures in the province such as Protestant minister Jacky Manuputty, Catholic nun Sister Brigita and many others.

Refusing to join the fighting, Hasbollah and his colleagues actively promoted peace in the battered province. They established the LKSP (Institute for Strategic Study and Empowerment) in 2002. Its mission has been to study the economy, politics, and education and to conduct reconciliation between Maluku's segregated societies.

"It was an unpopular move, but we didn't want people to be dragged further into the conflict," said Hasbollah, adding that the LKSP has also worked to help internally displaced people.

Hasbollah also played a role in peace-building prior to the Malino II peace agreement, which was initiated by then Coordinating Minister for the People's Welfare Jusuf Kalla and the Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. The agreement followed Malino I, a peace agreement for Poso.

Hasbollah later joined the delegation to Malino, and signing the agreement on Feb. 12, 2002. The fifth anniversary of the signing passed on Monday.

"We departed and boarded two different airplanes," recalled Hasbollah of the still heightened hatred between the two religious communities.

After signing the peace agreement, which didn't contain the word "peace" due to the sensitivities over the word, but contained "ending the conflict" instead, Hasbollah and the team had to disseminate the content of the peace agreement to the people of Maluku.

And that was still a very risky job.

During a dissemination meeting at one school in the Christian village of Passo, a bomb exploded in front of Amboina Hotel, lighting a fire that burned down the Maluku governor's office.

Hasbollah and others were trapped at the school.

At the school, one member of the dissemination team already appeared to be dead.

"The school's teachers vowed to help us," Hasbollah said.

The group eventually managed to escape the village, as the provoked residents began slaying perceived enemies.

"When we passed a Muslim village, Muslim figure Mahmud Rengifurwarin sat at the front seat with the window rolled down, but when we passed a Christian village, Suster Brigita took her turn sitting in the front seat," recalled Hasbollah.

He said now is high time for the people of Maluku to unite so that they can have bargaining power with Jakarta.

"Otherwise, Maluku will remain a battleground for people from outside the province," he said. •

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Effendi Gazali: Educating People Through Political Satire



political satire News Dot Com, also known as Republik Mimpi (Republic of Dreams), is challenging the limit of freedom of expression in Indonesia amid increasing political pressure.

Information and Communications Minister Sofyan Djalil said that the show, aired on television station Metro TV on

Sunday nights, presents a negative political education for people.

He admitted that he had no authority to ban the weekly show, which has been given the new name of Kerajaan Mimpi (Kingdom of Dreams). However, he said that he was planning to lodge a complaint with the country's broadcasting commission.

The man behind the show, Effendi Gazali, said that members of Metro TV have thrown their unconditional support behind the show despite the recent pressure. However, last week the show's main sponsor, cigarette company HM Sampoerna, severed its contract, forcing producers to reconsider a planned roadshow to 10 major cities which was to be financed by the cigarette company.

However, Effendi was defiant. "Suryo Paloh said that as long as there is press freedom, the TV program should continue," he said during a recent telephone interview with The Jakarta Post.

Surya Paloh is the founder of Metro TV and is a senior member

of the Golkar Party. Golkar is Indonesia's largest political party and is widely regarded as being the most influential party in the country. It is also the political vehicle of Vice President Jusuf Kalla.

Effendi said that he was aware of the fact that the Democratic Party, the political party of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, was planning to file a complaint against the show. A group from the ethnic Chinese community has also complained that the show is a "character assassination" against the national leader.

The program features actors humorously portraying current and former national leaders such as former presidents Soeharto, B.J. Habibie, Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid and Megawati Soekarnoputri. Effendi said he believed there had been no complaints about the show from those portrayed.

Another satire co-produced by Effendi, Republik Benar Benar Mabok (Heavily Drunken Republic), was canceled by television station Indosiar due to political pressure. Jusuf Kalla had previously assured the shows producers that he was not offended by the program and that it offered an educational alternative to the public.

However, the management of Indosiar asked that the program be changed into a situational comedy with a pre-planned scenario, a move that Effendi refused. The show was thus discontinued in May, 2006, after 32 episodes and was replaced by Pengadilan BBM (BBM Court), a standard comedy in which Effendi was not involved.

Effendi continued his program "off air", conducting a roadshow to major cities in the country, receiving a warm welcome from the public.

Republik Mimpi, a similar program, went on air in August 2006 on Metro TV.

Effendi believes that political satires provide effective political education for people. He claims that a large cross-section of the public are enthusiastic about such programs, which often humorously challenge government policies.

Born on Dec. 5, 1966, in Padang, West Sumatra, Effendi is also an academic and intellectual, having graduated from the Department

of Political and Social Sciences at the University of Indonesia majoring in communications. He also holds master's degrees in communications from the University of Indonesia and Cornell University, U.S. as well as a PhD in political communications from Nijmegan University, the Netherlands.

Aside from his television commitments, he is also a lecturer in communications in the post-graduate program at the University of Indonesia.

His published scholarly works include The Suharto Regime and Its Fall Through The Eyes Of The Local Media in the International Journal For Communications Studies (2002) and Negotiating Public and Community Media In Post-Suharto Indonesia in the Journal of The European Institute For Communication and Culture (2003).

Effendi received an academic award from the University of Indonesia for his research publications in regional and international journals during the university's 54th anniversary in 2004.

During his student days, he formed the comedy group Ikatan Remaja Memble Aje (IRMA) with colleagues. The group made an appearance on television station TVRI in the 1980s.

Effendi also once worked as a journalist for tabloid Mingguan Bola and was assigned to cover the 1990 World Cup in Italy.

He regretted the fact that despite Indonesia embracing reform, press freedom is still constantly under threat.

Effendi said that presidential endorsement for the recruitment of members of the Press Council had taken too long. While he admitted to having no idea what was behind the delay, he said that in the future "the recruitment process should follow that of the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission", which was conducted in a more transparent and effective manner.

Effendi quoted Thomas Jefferson in saying that if he was presented with two choices, "government without the press" or "the press without government", he would choose the latter.

Kenyir Lake: Perfect Place to Revive One's Spirits

hen I was invited to a retreat by Institut Kajian Dasar (with support from the Sasakawa Peace Foundation) at Kenyir Lake, Terengganu, Malaysia, I swiftly accepted the invitation.

Not only would this be my first visit to our northern neighbor, but also, as some of my colleagues found out, Kenyir Lake is really a beautiful place to relax and meditate.

The flight to Kuala Lumpur took around an hour and 45 minutes, barely less than the time spent to fly to Medan. A two-hour wait in sophisticated Kuala Lumpur International Airport was more than enough for me, as I just couldn't wait for what many argue is incomparable beauty of the largest manmade lake in Southeast Asia. I expected it be a long journey. It was. An additional one-hour flight from Kuala Lumpur landed me in small, somewhat dusty Sultan Mahmud Airport in Terengganu.

This was a simple and modest airport, located in the state capital, Kuala Terengganu, but it was very much part of the government-sponsored Visit Malaysia 2007 program celebrating 50 years of nationhood. Colorful banners were flying from almost every corner of the airport.

During a one-hour bus journey to Kenyir Lake, I managed to keep my eyes open to directly witness the day-to-day life of ordinary Malaysians, some of whom were selling nasi lemak to meet their needs.

I noticed that the state is typified by an obvious Malay culture, rural villages and serene coastal towns.

Stopping at one of the kedai (markets) to do a bit of shopping, I managed to converse with pleasant kampong people.

Terengganu's population is around 927,000. It comprises mostly Malays while the remainder are Indians, Chinese and people of other ethnicities. It is a living celebration of diversity.

With its tropical climate, the state is a perfect place for those who long for a tropical atmosphere. As I was there in January, I experienced sporadic showers, which occur between November and February.

Arriving at Kenyir Lakeview Resort, I could immediately smell the fragrance of clean and clear water. It was great to flee temporarily my chaotic life in Jakarta and Serang, I said to myself.

Terengganu is located on the east coast of peninsular Malaysia. It is blessed with the longest shoreline in Malaysia and its pretty islands glisten gorgeously like jewelry in the South China Sea.

Several islands are carefully and professionally conserved as marine gardens, making them an obvious destination for tourists and nature-lovers alike.

It extends over approximate area of 38,000 hectares, including 430 jade-colored islands.

It is a place that offers an assortment of fish, land animals and birds, and innumerable plant types—the product of perfect cooperation between man and nature.

Kenyir Lake is undoubtedly a delight for nature-lovers, adventurers and voyagers. The area is a perfect spot for those who love boating, forest-trekking, canoeing, and other sporting activities such as squash, tennis and cycling, as a vast tropical forest beautifully surrounds this large lake.

Due to my packed schedule during the retreat, I was unable to try all the activities on offer. However, I did ride not only a boat to nearby islands to see Sack Waterfalls and Herba Garden, but also a raft we assembled ourselves during our outbound activities.

Accommodation was also superb. The resort has around 150 high-quality wooden chalets for guests. With wooden glass doors

and soaring ceilings, the chalets allow visitors to feel they are communing with nature.

The food the resort provides was similarly delectable, as the cuisine and seafood here are well-known for being delicious.

Kenyir Lake was a heaven of solitude and tranquility to invigorate not only the rainforest, but also to revive one's own soul and spirit.

How to get there

Malaysia Airlines and AirAsia provide everyday flights from Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) to Sultan Mahmud Airport in Terengganu. It is approximately a one-hour drive from Sultan Mahmud Airport in Terengganu to Kenyir Lakeview Resort.

Terengganu can likewise be reached via a four-hour drive along the East Cost Expressway. To reach the resort, the shortest way is through Kuantan taking the Jerangau-Jabor Highway to Tasik Kenyir.

If you are approaching from the south, take the Kota Tinggi-Mersing course to Kuantan, then further up the Jerangau-Jabor highway. From Kelantan or Thailand, before reaching Kenyir, you will pass through Kuala Terengganu.

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Saiful Mujani: From Fundamentalist to Pluralist



Imost a decade after reform began to take place in Indonesia, the country's political leaders still struggle to live out their newfound democratic ideals.

"Political parties are an important element in democracy, but they have failed to conduct a proper recruitment process. Just show me capable people in political parties. Many of them are good in mobilizing masses

because they have money. Very few of them have expertise and technocratic capacities," executive director of the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) Saiful Mujani told The Jakarta Post recently.

"And you can see that current capable ministers like Sri Mulyani, Boediono and Mar'ie Pangestu are not from political parties, they are intellectuals from universities," he added.

The recent emergence of a television personality as a candidate for the upcoming Jakarta governor's election is another indication of the failure of political parties, Saiful said.

"Even in the U.S., movie stars becoming politicians is very casebased. But in the first direct governor's election in an important capital, Jakarta? Come on... what have they (the political parties) been doing?"

Opposition parties such as the Indonesian Democratic Party of

Struggle have also failed to take clear stances on important issues, he said.

"They criticize the President, (saying) that he is merely working to 'spread his charm', but what is the point of saying that? 'Spreading charm' is part of politics," Saiful said.

"They criticize the government over his rice import policy, but they provide no alternative. I even don't know which political parties support or are against the rice import policy."

According to Saiful, whose organization has successfully predicted past election results in the country, including the 2004 presidential election, intellectuals should join political parties, so that when a new cabinet is formed they are ready to be ministerial candidates.

"Political parties should offer incentives to intellectuals...
promise them that they will be designated to become ministers if
the party wins the election," said Saiful, who is also an associate
professor in political studies at Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic
University.

Born on Aug. 8, 1962, in Serang, Banten, Saiful grew up in a family with strong Islamic values and with political inclinations toward Masyumi and Persatuan Islam.

His father, KH Syamsudin, was a religion teacher and member in the management of the second-biggest Islamic boarding school in the province, Mathlaul Anwar.

Saiful spent his elementary education in the boarding school. However, he was sent to Jakarta to study at a state senior high school because his parents wanted him to widen his horizons and knowledge.

Saiful said he suffered from culture shock living in Jakarta.

"Growing up in a community with a belief that its religion holds the absolute truth, I failed to tolerate the religious differences that I confronted in Jakarta," recalled Saiful.

"I had strong determination to convince others that my Islamic path was correct and others were wrong," he recalled. So he read various books on comparative religion by scholars such as Sidi Ghazalba, Hasbullah Bakri, H.M. Rasjidi, and M. Natsir. He even had a Christian girlfriend during high school, whom he tried to convince to convert to Islam, but he failed, "so we broke up." Later he enrolled at IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah because he wanted to learn more from its faculties.

"It was the university that changed me from a fundamentalist to a pluralist, as many scholars there promoted tolerance in religious diversity, including Harun Nasution and my seniors, Nurcholis Madjid, Komarudin Hidayat and Azyumardi Azra," said Saiful, who was also involved in the Indonesian Muslim Association during his student days at the university.

After completing his undergraduate degree in Islamic studies, Saiful worked for scholar Dawam Rahardjo's Institute of Religious and Philosophical Study, where he became interested in political and social philosophy.

At the institution, he was involved in the publication of the then famous journal Ulumul Qur'an.

When his senior Azumardi Azra returned from the U.S. after completing his PhD, Azumardi and others including Saiful established the Center for the Study of Islam and Society in 1994 and started the publication of its internationally acclaimed journal, Studia Islamika.

Saiful received a Fulbright scholarship to earn a master's degree in political science at Ohio State University, after receiving a recommendation from noted Indonesianist William Liddle of the university.

He continued his PhD with the support of the university, and finished in 2003. His dissertation Religious Democrats: Democratic Culture and Muslim Political Participation in Post-Suharto Indonesia, which was based on two national surveys he and PPIM conducted in Indonesia, was regarded as the best dissertation in political science at the university that year.

After returning to Indonesia, Saiful and his colleagues Rizal

Mallarangeng, Denny J.A. and others helped establish a research institution, the Indonesian Survey Institute, in August 2003.

Denny J.A. became its executive director and Saiful the academic director. Saiful was responsible for the quality and methodology of the survey.

Saiful said that Indonesian democracy would function more effectively if it was responsive to the perceptions, expectations and evaluations of the public.

Regular public opinion monitoring that serves as an input to political process and policy making is vital in a democratic system, he said.

"And surveys are the most systematic and efficient way of measure public opinion," Saiful said. He said the Gallup, Harris, Roper and Corsley polls were survey institutions that were helpful to the development of democracy in the U.S.

LSI made its debut during the first direct presidential election, with its Election Channel program being aired on television. Its surveys were the main topic of the show for a full year.

Saiful was also involved in the famous Quick Count program, which was conducted in cooperation with LP3ES, the Freedom Institute and Metro TV.

However, due to disagreements over how to implement the principles of LSI's independence and survey methodology, Denny resigned in 2005 and Saiful became LSI's executive director.

Denny established a similar institution called Lingkaran Survei Indonesia.

Saiful believes that the independence of LSI is imperative to upholding and maintaining the institution's credibility.

He added than another aspect that could help strengthen democracy was pluralism. The low acceptance of diversity within society would result in a horizontal conflict, and the energy of the state might be exhaustively absorbed in tackling the problem.

"A test of pluralism is how tolerant we are toward minority groups, particularly in the religious sphere," said Saiful, who is married to Baiquniah, and has three children.

Interfaith dialog has shown an improvement, but not dialog "within communities with the same religion," he said.

He cited as an example of the case of Ahmadiyah, whose members have been condemned by other Muslims.

"But the state was in a dilemma because it could not afford to the lose support of the majority. So we need strong and decisive leadership to tackle this sort of problem, as based on our constitution we have the right to practice what we believe. Otherwise anarchism will triumph," Saiful said.

He said religious and community leaders should educate their followers about the importance of tolerance in multi-ethnic and multi-religious Indonesia.

He also said that civil groups were important to help a maintain healthy democracy. "Strong societal organizations can function to absorb and articulate people's aspirations to be conveyed to the policy makers," he said.

"The more we have society-based organizations, the healthier it will be for our democracy." •

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Siti Musdah Mulia Stands Up for Her Convictions



the degree of piousness of Muslim women? Muslim scholar and women's activist Siti Musdah Mulia's experience may help answer this question.

During a flight from Medina to Cairo to do research for her doctoral dissertation at Syarif Hidayatullah Islamic University, Musdah and all women on board were fully veiled.

"When the plane made a transit stop in Jedah, some women began to relax their attire. To my surprise some men began to sip wine. And even more surprisingly, when the plane landed in Cairo, all of the women entirely put away their veils and were dressed up in complete Western attire," recalled Musdah during a recent interview with The Jakarta Post.

When Musdah asked some of the women why they changed their clothes, one of them said: "Oh, that's only our traditional dress. Here (in Egypt) wearing a veil is not a tradition."

It was a first-hand experience for Musdah, who had grown up in a religiously strict environment, that the Hanafi mazhab (school of thought) is more relaxed than the Syafi'i.

This means Islam is not a religion which holds a monolithic interpretation, Musdah said.

When asked why she herself wears a Malay-styled veil, Musdah said: "I wear this simply because I feel comfortable, not because I feel I am religiously forced to wear this ... and certainly not because of the sharia-inspired bylaws."

She was refering to several bylaws of the country that oblige women to wear the veil.

"I am worried that even our five-time-a-day prayers will soon be regulated by laws As a result our religious ritual will no longer come from our heart, but from fear of being prosecuted," she warned.

Musdah quoted woman Muslim Sufi Rabiatul Adawiyah in saying that "she would prefer to have heaven put away from her if she prays merely for heaven".

Born March 3, 1958, in Bone, South Sulawesi, Musdah moved to Surabaya with her parents and went to elementary school there. But her grandfather asked her parents to take her back to Sulawesi, fearing that further secular education would alienate her from religious knowledge, "which my grandfather believed was important for a young girl like me."

So Musdah studied in a traditional Salafiah As'adiyah Islamic boarding school in Wajo, South Sulawesi, until completing Aliyah (Islamic high school).

Still living with her grandfather, Musdah continued studying Arabic literature at IAIN Alaudin Makassar, completing her degree in 1982.

"My grandfather was even highly distrustful when my male colleagues visited our house to return my textbooks," recalled Musdah.

But Musdah said that it was her marriage to tolerant and broad-minded husband Ahmad Thib Raya that eventually set her free, because "he came from a religious but enlightened family".

She believes that marriage is a serious social contract between men and women, which should adhere to the principles of endless love and being polite or civilized to each other.

"That is why it is beyond my comprehension why many religious leaders commit polygamy and have no respect toward equality between men and women," said Musdah.

She said that she wanted to spread the freedom and respect she enjoys to other women, "so I want to transfer my belief into a system."

As a senior researcher at the Religious Affairs Ministry and an adviser to the minister, she began her "war" against what she perceives as the gender-biased Islamic Law, which was put into effect through presidential instruction in 1991 and has become a "holy" reference for judges in religious courts.

"Women are exploited as mere sexual objects," she said of the law.

So Musdah and her team designed a document called a counter legal draft, meticulously written to challenge and replace the Islamic Law, in 2004.

The draft includes a provision forbidding polygamy, while inter-faith marriage is allowed and children are free to choose their own religion.

It immediately drew a barrage of criticism from conservative segments of Muslim society. The Indonesian Ulema Council condemned the draft as a bid'ah (diversion) and taghyir (change) of original Islamic law and a gross manipulation of Koranic verses.

After massive pressure, then religious affairs minister Said Agiel Al Munawar forbade Musdah and her team to conduct seminars and workshops using the ministry's official name, and instructed them to return all pertinent documents to the ministry.

The next religious affairs minister, Maftuh Basyuni, canceled the draft in 2005.

"But no one can stop the spread of ideas," Musdah said, pointing out that several doctoral dissertations have been written based on the draft she and her team wrote.

Musdah, the first woman to receive a research professorship from Indonesian Institute of Sciences and the first to do her dissertation on Islamic political thought, said the Koran should be critically read and interpreted using a historical perspective.

"For example, the an-Nisa verses of the Koran, which talk about men's leadership, should be read contextually that at that time men were more qualified than women because in the jahiliah period the latter were not exposed to education."

"However, today we find many women who are more educated and qualified than men," said Musdah.

"And we should not condemn Muslims who convert to a different religion. I myself have a positive thought that those who convert from one religion to another are still in the process of searching."

Musdah further said that Koranic verses are classified into two categories: gath'iy al-dalalah and zhanny al-dalalah. The first indicates the absolutism of the verses, and the second shows that the verses can be multi-interpretable.

"I regard the physically written form of all Koranic verses as qath'iy al-dalalah, while the generating meaning all of them is at the same time zhanny al-dalalah," said Musdah, adding that Prophet Muhammad urged his followers to use ijtihad (independent reasoning) in grasping the deeper messages of the Koran.

Musdah has written numerous scholarly works, including Potret Perempuan dalam Lektur Islam (Portrait of Women in Islamic Lectures) (1999), Islam Menggugat Poligami (Islam Challenging Polygamy) (2004) and Muslimah Reformis, Perempuan Pembaharu Keagamaan (Muslimah Reformist, Women as Religious Reformers) (2005).

Musdah received the Kelirumologi Award from the Kelirumologi Study Center Institute in 2005 for her efforts in promoting gender equality.

She said that gender inequality can be found in three aspects of the country's law: content of law, culture of law and structure of law.

"Patriarchal culture is still strong, reinforced by unbending religious interpretation. And at the structural level, insensitivities still can be found among law enforcers and judges," said Musdah.

Very recently she was given an International Women of Courage award from U.S. foreign minister Condoleezza Rice. The award was presented in conjunction with International Women's Day on March 8.

"I was at first reluctant to go to the U.S. to receive the award as this would strengthen the wrong perception among fundamentalists that I am a Zionist agent working to destroy Islam," she said, adding that she was finally assured by her colleagues that this award was constructive to her struggle.

However, praise from the world's super-power has not dampened her critical thinking. When Rice asked Musdah what the U.S. could do to contribute to her work, she responded: "I would like the U.S. to change its violence-based foreign policy." •

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Budhy Munawar-Rachman: Journey Toward (Religious) Pluralism



Munawar-Rachman looked relieved and satisfied. Completing a 4,000-page series of books on the thoughts of the late Muslim thinker Nurcholish "Cak Nur" Madjid required a lot of patience, hard work and a high degree of accuracy, for which Budhy deserves praise.

Cak Nur passed away in 2005

due to illness.

"It has been my dream (to complete such a series) since 1996, and it was a fully rewarding and intellectual experience for me," Budhy, who first met Cak Nur in 1984 and later became his assistant in 1992 at the Paramadina Foundation, told The Jakarta Post of his series of books Ensiklopedi Nurcholish Madjid.

The series, comprising four volumes, comprehensively compiles the thoughts and opinions of Cak Nur, and was mostly transcribed from oral presentations, discussions and lectures, and scholarly papers presented at various conferences and seminars.

When asked why he decided to use the word Ensiklopedi, Budhy said that Cak Nur was just like an encyclopedia. He had a broad knowledge of Islam and modernism and his thoughts have become a source which people from various backgrounds can consult from students to intellectuals, and even presidential candidates.

"Cak Nur is a source of inspiration for many, and his thoughts went way beyond his generation. For some, his thoughts might be considered controversial, but they have profoundly influenced the direction of Islamic discourse and movements in this country, especially toward the acceptance of moderation, secularization and pluralism," said Budhy.

"Cak Nur is simply indispensable."

Budhy transcribed and edited Cak Nur's lectures from 1996 to 2002. From 2004 to 2006 he worked almost full-time on editing before arranging them into the four-set series.

Born on June 22, 1963, in Jakarta, Budhy grew up in somewhat of a mixed "traditionalist" and "modernist" Muslim family.

His father, Abd. Rachman Shaleh, a research professor in Islamic studies at the Religious Affairs Ministry, graduated from an Islamic boarding school, or pesantren, affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), while his mother, Siti Munawarah, was a member of Muhammadiyah.

It was perhaps this non-monolithic atmosphere that enabled Budhy to humbly accept differences, "although my father's influence was stronger than my mother's," he said.

"One thing about my parents that made them very similar is that they never spoke ill of non-Muslims," Budhy said.

His flexibility and willingness in embracing pluralism was enhanced even further when his parents sent him to secular and public schools in the morning and then to the religious Madrasah al-Ittihad school in Tanah Abang, Central Jakarta, in the afternoons.

"I studied all-day long," recalled Budhy, "and I thank my parents for giving me a solid Islamic education, both at home and in the madrasah, which has been vital in the subsequent years of my life and in dealing with difficult religious discourses and doctrines."

After completing high school, Budhy developed an interest in helping the local Muslim community. He undertook community development training at pesantren Asyafi'iyah in Jakarta. The training, called Sekolah Tinggi Pariwisata, was a joint collaboration between noted research institute LP3ES, led by Dawam Rahardjo, development study institute LSP, led by Adi Sasono, and the pesantren itself.

Budhy studied the philosophies of Paulo Freire, whose emphasis on dialog was well-known among those concerned with informal education, and Ivan Illich, whose polemics on the different forms of professional authority, such as his idea onsociety", earned the philosopher an unsavory reputation.

Teachers at the school included Mansur Fagih, a student of Muslim scholar Harun Nasution, who was famous for his teachings on rational Islam and neo-Mu'tazilah, accepting that the future is in the hands of man, or to put it radically: man decides and God follows. Other teachers at the school included Utomo Danandjava, who taught Budhy about the importance of tolerance, and Roem Topatimasang, who taught leftist philosophy.

The training was a real eye-opener for Budhy in learning that Islam, indeed, has many faces.

The school, however, only managed to produce one batch of graduates as it was closed down in 1984 after a dispute among members of the pesantren who believed that the school was leading students downdangerous path".

Budhy later joined the Proklamasi Religious Study group in the house of Djohan Effendi, together with activists Fachri Ali and Bachtiar Effendi and activist-turned-journalist Syafi'i Anwar.

"It was a study group designed to welcome home Cak Nur, who, at the time, had almost finished writing his PhD in the U.S.," recalled Budhy.

He also enrolled in the Catholic-oriented STF Driyarkara Institute of Philosophy, and found his time there to beand intellectually worthwhile."

Unlike other religion-oriented schools, STF Driyarkara welcomes students from various religious backgrounds, learned Catholic theology, not from Muslims, but directly from Catholics themselves," said Budhy. His lecturers included Christ Veshaak,

J. Verhaar, Kees Bertens and Franz Magnis-Suseno. He said he was marveled by the teachings of love within Christianity. "It is an unconditional love, which is nearly impossible for ordinary human beings to learn," he said.

Budhy did not stop there. He later studied Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. He said his study of oriental mysticism with Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, and his visit to India in 1992 have sharpened his sense of wisdom and spirituality, and have ensured him that at the end of the dayreligions are good."

Reflecting on his religious and spiritual journey, Budhy said he applies "passing-over" methodology, meaning that he crosses over his own religion and embraces another, andback" methodology, which means as a pious Muslim, he should consider everything he learns from other religions or spiritual philosophies.

Budhy is currently the project officer of Islam and Civil Society at The Asia Foundation. The Foundation's approach in Indonesia is to recognize the vital role of Islam in defining the country's political and social identity. He also teaches Islamic thought at STF Driyarkara.

Nevertheless, just like Cak Nur, Budhy has been unable to escape controversy. His involvement in interfaith marriage agreements has earned him notoriety among mainstream Muslims.

"Interfaith marriage is merely a logical consequence of pluralism," defended Budhy.

"Many couples, particularly Muslims and non-Muslims - find difficulty in getting married. Ultimately, one person is forced to change their religion in order to get married, which is bad. We are just trying to help, as the state is still helpless," he said, adding that interfaith marriage is religiously acceptable. •

Henk Schulte Nordholt: Recording the Daily Lives of Indonesians

n 2003 Dutch historian and anthropologist Henk Schulte Nordholt made a film about a community near Ciliwung River in Kampung Melayu, East Jakarta, that had been devastated by floods.

Four years later, Nordholt went back to the same place to film and was astonished to find that the community was completely back on its feet.

"I admire how Indonesian people manage to survive during difficult times and cope with such disasters. I have a deep sense of respect for Indonesians," Nordholt told The Jakarta Post last week, days after he visited the Kampung Melayu community for the second time.



Nordholt, younger brother of noted scholar Nico Schulte Nordholt, is working on a project called Don't Forget to Remember Me: An Audiovisual Archive of Everyday Life in Indonesia in the 21st Century. The project is sponsored by Leiden-based Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology (KITLV), where Nordholt is head of the research department.

KITLV and the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) signed a formal agreement to jointly create an innovative archive of the everyday lives of people in eight locations around the country. The locations are Jakarta; Delanggu, in Central Java; Payakumbuh, in West Sumatra; Kawal village, on Bintan island; Sintang, in West Kalimantan; Bittuang, in Sulawesi; Ternate; and Surabaya.

"Discussions, feedback and evaluations for the archive were conducted by LIPI staff, and the first four years of recording —235 hours of footage—has been handed over to LIPI," he said.

"We focus on the history of certain places, and every four years return to them to record what transpired while we were gone."

Nordholt and his crew filmed people shopping in Pasar Baru in Jakarta; at an intersection in Payakumbuh, West Sumatra; a street in the village of Kawal, on the island of Bintan; a market in Bintuang, in Tana Toraja, Sulawesi; a train station and bus terminal in Surabaya; early morning gymnastics classes in Bittuang; a flagraising ceremony at a primary school in Sintang, West Kalimantan; a jumatan (Friday prayer) in Kawal; the production of kitchen utensils in Delanggu, Central Java; as well as interviews with a local politician in Payakumbuh, a sweeper in Jakarta, a traditional architect in Bintuang and a schoolgirl in Sintang.

"People are always willing to cooperate. They like the fact that we don't film famous figures, because they say that they—the ordinary people—are also important. Researchers and film-makers will get a lot of use out of the archive," said Nordholt, adding he hoped the project would last for at least 100 years.

The project is a work of visual anthropology, focusing on history, but using anthropological methodology.

Nordholt believes that exploration of the history of everyday life and challenges in setting up new sources and analytical approaches is important for Indonesian historians. In the past, official historiography generally followed government procedure and was either an account of the events under Indonesia's first president Sukarno, or a developmental narrative observing the accomplishments of the New Order regime.

Such approaches hinder advanced explorations of social history and leave "ordinary" Indonesians devoid of any significant role in their own history.

Born on June 13, 1953, in De Bilt, the Netherlands, Nordholt's love for Indonesia can be traced back to his own family's history.

His father, H. G. Schulte Nordholt, served as a civil servant in Kefanmenanu, West Timor, during the colonial period in the 1930s. During the Japanese occupation, his family went through a turbulent period and was forced to return to the Netherlands.

"My father started a new career teaching history at a high school in the Netherlands. He later taught at a university and became an anthropologist," recalled Nordholt. "He never pushed me to study Indonesia, but I always knew that he wanted me to."

His father gave him a ticket to Indonesia as a high school graduation gift. Nordholt came to Indonesia for the first time in 1972, with Bali as his destination.

"There was no electricity there, but it was so beautiful and romantic. I was really in love (with Bali) at first sight. So, I decided to conduct research there. The 1965 killings in Bali intrigued me: How could so much violence and cruelty occur on such a beautiful island?"

Nordholt said his father was thrilled when he told him of his plan to enroll in Indonesian studies. He completed his MA degree in history (with honors) at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 1980 and PhD (with honors) at the same university in 1988.

"After Bali, I focused on rural crime, the system of jago (strongmen) in rural Java and how the jago became kaki tangan (proxy hit men); a remnant of the colonial system. You might say that preman (hooligans) are the grandchildren of the jago," Nordholt said.

"Beauty is something that you see at first glance, but behind that beauty you may find violence, tension and conflict. I was very intrigued as to whether or not there was a certain system to this violence, as is it not part of the culture, but is inherited from the colonial experience," Nordholt said, adding that many in the Netherlands refuted his argument.

"Decentralization was a top-down operation lacking any fundamental discussion. Neo-liberal ideology (argues that) less control from the state means more democracy, less centralization means good governance and less state control means a stronger civil society. But this is only in theory. International funding agencies such as the World Bank ignore the fact that the big winners are actually the local elites, seasoned bureaucrats, new businessmen and aristocrats."

He said he was optimistic about the vitality of electoral democracy in Indonesia. "But there needs to be a more substantial, institutional democracy implemented. Indonesia still has a long way to go."

He is convinced that Indonesia will remain united.

"Although they have many differences, Indonesians also have a lot in common. If you look closely at the ways in which they express themselves, such as in seminars—in the opening speeches, at snack-time or during discussions—it still convinces me that Indonesians really do have much more in common than they are ready to admit..." •

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M. Dawam rahardjo: defending the nation's religious minority groups



by a Jakarta radio station on August 4, 2005 veteran Muslim activist M. Dawam Rahardjo blatantly attacked the Indonesian Council of Ulemas (MUI) for declaring Ahmadiyah teachings as hearsay.

He said MUI had no right to declare such fatwa or religious edicts that discriminate against

minority groups.

He also regretted said fatwa had led to many Ahmadiyah members being attacked and their houses of worship destroyed by provoked rioters.

The discussion, however, turned ugly when some hardliners in the studio audience stood up, approached Dawam and threatened him with violence unless he stopped talking.

But Dawam has always stood firmly beside his principles.

On April 17, 2006, Dawam led hundreds of members of the National Alliance for Freedom of Religion and Belief in their march to the Ministry of Religious Affairs to protest the minister's stance on Ahmadiyah.

The minister said Ahmadiyah was a danger to the spirit of tolerance across the nation.

Dawam not only defended Ahmadiyah, he showed support for other minority groups, including Komunitas Eden, whose leader, Lia Aminudin, claims to be the manifestation of Gabriel.

Dawam visited her when she was detained at the Jakarta Police detention house and attended her court proceedings at Central Jakarta State Court.

And when Komunitas Eden activist M. Abdul Rachman was detained at Salemba prison in East Jakarta, Dawam sent him a copy of his short story (published by Kompas) to boost Abdul's morale.

The story is about the group's activism and its struggle to find the truth.

A group of hardliners staged protests in front of Kompas daily, claiming Dawam's short story insulted Islam.

"Tolerance is a key to peace, brotherhood and progress," Dawam said during the launch of a book which comprises articles written by his friends to celebrate his 65th birthday.

"Tolerance will not weaken our own belief, it will instead encourage us to understand and accept others," he said.

His tolerant attitude, however, does not come for free.

"Many of my old friends at the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) left me because they regard pluralism as a threat.

"Many wrongly accuse me of becoming a follower of Ahmadiyah or Komunitas Eden. I merely defend their existence and respect for what they believe," he said.

Born on April 20, 1942 in Baluwarti, Solo, Central Java, Dawam's interest in literary was developed when his aunt Ba'diyah would tell him stories after his Koranic lessons, including Hikayat Amir Hamzah and Flash Gordon.

His father, Zuhdi Rahardjo, a Muhammadiyah teacher and entrepreneur, never hesitated to spend money on Dawam's books.

Dawam was educated in Bustanul Athfal Muhammadiyah and later Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah Muhammadiyah at Masjid Besar Solo.

In the morning he attended the first grade of public school Al Robithoh al-Allawiyah.

He later continued his study at public elementary school Loji Wetan in the morning and Madrasah Diniyah Al-Islam in the afternoon; Junior High School and Senior High School in Manahan.

His first poems were published in Harian Abadi and he mingled with many writers, including Kustiowismo, Aslamah Jasin, Sogijono, Abdul Nur Adnan, Lasti Fardani, Ken Suheni, Darmanto Jatman, Elrlanda Rosi Ds., Husin Landicing, Jussac MR.

Some of these writers "disappeared" after 1965 due to their involvement in Indonesian Communist Party's cultural wing Lekra.

Dawam was later awarded the American Field Service (AFS) fellowship to study in Borah High School in Idaho, U.S., among others, due to his involvement in PII (Indonesian Islamic Student) association.

But instead of becoming a poet and after distancing himself from many of his friends involved in Lekra, Dawam enrolled at Faculty of Economics at Gadjah Mada University where he was involved intensively in Islamic Students Association (HMI).

He established a Marxism Study Club with Arief Budiman, Sritua Arief and Farchan Bulkin.

After completing his degree in economics, he stayed at Bank of America for two years as a trainee officer.

He switched to renowned research institute LP3ES, where Nono Anwar Makarim was director.

He was further involved in many grassroots development projects supported by Friederich Naumann Stiftung.

At the age of 38, Dawam became its director.

He edited and wrote several scholarly works during his time at LP3ES including Insan Kamil: Konsepsi Manusia Menurut Islam (Insan Kamil: Human Conception according to Islam (1985), Pergulatan Dunia Pesantren: Membangun Dari Bawah (The Struggle of Pesantren: Development from the Grassroots), Esai-esai Ekonomi Politik (Essays on Economics and Politics) (1983), Pesantren dan Pembaharuan (Pesantren and Modernism) (1984), and Perekonomian Indonesia: Pertumbuhan dan Krisis (Indonesia's Economy: Growth and Crisis (1987).

Dawam was awarded a professorship from Muhammadiyah Malang University in 1993 and was involved in the formation of ICMI. He became rector of Universitas Islam '45 (UNISMA).

Scholar Franz Magnis Suseno said Dawam's spirit for tolerance developed because he viewed religion as not theory or ideology, but a force to lift up those who are marginalized and exploited.

The mushrooming of non-government organizations in the 1980s is inseparable from Dawam's struggle to introduce and implement "people's economy".

It is because of his colorful career as an Islamic and NGO activist and trained economist—as well as his evolving perspective toward religions—that Dawam has evolved into a genuine pluralist who defends the rights of religious minority groups including Ahmadiyah, Komunitas Eden and Syi'ah.

He is against the bill on anti-pornography because he it would restrain creativity and kill the plurality of Indonesian culture.

Dawam may no longer be psychically strong but his mind is still active. He is still able to produce numerous short stories and essays despite his hospitalization.

And his voice remains critical and as outspoken as ever.

Especially when he sees his countrymen being marginalized or ill-treated.

Daniel Dhakidae, his long time friend at LP3ES, said Dawam might forget people's names, a long time habit—but one thing he will always remember and stick to is justice. •

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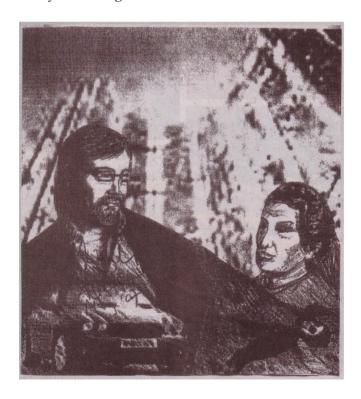
Short Story: The Journalist

Ou are now a grown-up. You need to learn several more facts about your family, I cannot keep this secret for the rest of my life," said Bagas' mother one morning.

Bagas asked, reluctantly, "Is it about father again? His career as a journalist?"

Bagas was now in the last semester at the school of journalism. If his father had still been alive, he could, indeed, have learned more about journalism from him.

But it was about something else. His mother said, "I'm sorry but I'm not your biological mother."



Bagas was speechless. This woman whom he had known for years was not his mother.

"Your father was murdered and your mother was thought to have committed suicide."

Bagas was stunned.

"He was a journalist at a local newspaper, as I've always told you. But there is more that I haven't revealed to you. It is about his extensive writing on a huge scandal allegedly involving the city mayor and big corporations. It was a billion-dollar scandal at a time when poverty struck the city."

"Your father was shot dead when walking out of his house. His colleagues believed that he was murdered because of what he had written. But no one had a clue about who actually pulled the trigger, fatally shooting him five times at close range in cold blood," she explained with a trembling voice.

"Your mother was on the terrace of the house and was an inch away from being killed, too, when the assassin ran out of bullets. Fortunately, you were holidaying at your aunt's house. Your mother was the only witness; she was unconscious for days. She said later that she knew the assassin."

She held her breath, "Just a week after the murder, your mother was found dead, her body hanging in the hospital room. Some believed she had committed suicide, but relatives said that she had a tough personality, so suicide was out of question."

"I was a nurse at the hospital, grabbing you when you and other family members were about to visit your mother at the hospital at the time she was found dead. I was actually the very first person who found your mother's body hanging in the room."

Bagas was shaking.

She paused a second. "To be honest, I kidnapped you, the only child they had. I was a divorced woman with no kids. I stayed at work for a month to disguise my action before I fled the city with you, my sweetheart."

Your sweetheart?

Bagas stood up, immediately went to his room and banged and locked the door. He felt as if thousands of knives were stabbing and slashing his brain into pieces.

I heard five gunshots. They sounded like a thunderbolt, breaking a peace-loving neighborhood, scaring even the fiery dogs ... Slowly blood was spilling to the ground, making it red all over. I could still smell the blood and the smoke. my father might have never heard the gunshot that killed him, but surely he must have felt the pain ... this pain.

(Many years later)

His mother was lying on the bed; four strokes and blood hypertension had effectively crippled her.

Bagas, now celebrated as the most successful media magnate in the country, sat solemnly beside her bed. His sweet-mannered wife, Anita, appeared, bringing a bowl of chicken soup, a cup of porridge and a glass of warm water.

"She looks healthier now," whispered Anita, softly. "She has been eating very well lately."

"That's good, very good. Remind me of when her medical checkup is," said Bagas.

"That would be tomorrow," Anita replied, adding that she had already bought two tickets for her and her mother-in-law to go to Singapore.

"And also tickets to go the U.S. to visit our sons next week," Anita added, referring to their two grown-up sons who were now studying at Harvard and Boston universities.

"That's good, I can't wait."

Bagas kissed the woman's cheek, and whispered lovingly, "You are always my mother."

The aging woman nodded, slowly.

However, without everyone's realizing it, she looked awfully troubled every time she stared at Bagas. There was something mentally disturbing in this sharp, unwavering man that always made her uneasy; it was like a wicked spirit disquieting her inner feeling, coursing strongly and painfully through her veins.

Forgive me ... She bit her lips, they bled.

Bagas drove his gleaming black Jaguar out of his lavish apartment block, vainly struggling to speed through the hectic traffic. He parked the car in a special space at the huge complex of his own media corporation.

He inhaled deeply. Many accused him of being too ferocious in expanding his business, and being cruel to smaller players. Being armed with the power of money and political connection raised suspicion that he never gave it a second thought to twist anything to suit his goal.

He decided not to get out of the car immediately. Stretching out his drained body and soul, Bagas couldn't wait to visit his sons in the U.S. next week, where at least he could relax a bit after having worked so hard lately.

Well, he and Anita might also continue traveling to Europe, he thought. Strolling down the road in Paris or capturing the struggling East-West mood of the Turkish hinterland.

He had been so preoccupied recently, welcoming several political and business figures at his office with election time coming soon. Those boring b*****ds trying to buy me! he laughed cynically.

He managed shrewdly to maintain his subtle political connections. Striking a balance between professionalism and political pressure and temptation is indeed mentally exhausting, but it thrilled him.

Bagas claimed that he never interfered in the editorial content of the media he led, though his staff often had to painfully exercise self-censorship when they had to report on issues relating to their own media corporation.

But that is out of my control, he chuckled, a bit haughtily.

Now he was entertaining a possibly lucrative chance to expand his business empire into neighboring countries.

Staff had recently reported to him that some media groups in the Philippines and Thailand were at the edge of collapse; his inimitable mix of entrepreneurial and journalistic instinct told him that something could be done to help the ailing media.

But that was not going to be easy. In the Philippines the political killing of journalists had always been a ritual, and in Thailand the frantic junta had always made the industry unpredictable.

But he could smell a golden opportunity—a risky but calculated challenge, the tense negotiation, the increased political influence, the rewriting of history and the unremitting flow of money.

I could still smell the smoking gun. I could still smell the blood ... I saw a body of a slim man crumbling after five deadly gunshots. My father might never have heard the last gunshot that put an end to his life and my mother might never have seen the jerking rope that broke her neck, but surely they must have felt the pain ... this pain ...

He saw himself rewriting history. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, May 27, 2007

Audy Budiarti: Helping Children with Cleft Lips

hen 7-year-old Nabila was admitted to Fatmawati Hospital with burns to 70 percent of her body, plastic and reconstruction surgeon Audy Budiarti was determined to help give her a new life.

"Nabila was involved in an awful accident. She was playing on the street when a panicked neighbor threw his burning kerosene stove into the street. Nabila was immediately engulfed by flames and was badly burned," Audy told The Jakarta Post.

Audy says she shares in Nabila's sorrow and that of her family, as the accident happened unexpectedly and has changed the young girl's life forever.

"She has recovered almost 90 percent, but we had to wait for almost a year to prepare skin for a graft. It doesn't happen overnight."



A skin graft involves the removal of a section of skin from one part of the body, which is then used to replace damaged skin on another part.

Since Nabila's body was badly burned, her treatment has been a long process.

"Patience and understanding is needed from myself as the doctor, Nabila and her family," said Audy, a devout catholic.

Nabila comes from a poor Muslim family. Her father works as a cleaner at a public health center, or Puskesmas, in Depok, West Java, and her mother is a housewife.

Audy does not limit her service to the hospital where she works; she is also involved in several social work activities.

In 1998, she started involving herself in social work activities with the Indonesian Association of Plastic Surgeons (IAPS). During her involvement, she has performed cleft palate surgery on as many as 250 children throughout the country.

Audy encouraged younger doctors to join IAPS to contribute to society. She took a step back in 2002 and left the junior doctors to take over her role at the organization.

Following her departure from IAPS, Ibu Non Rawung, chairwoman of Obor Berkat Indonesia Foundation, invited her to join the foundation.

"The foundation had no facilities to help the poor," said Audy, who helped organize donations for the foundation.

Under the foundation's banner, she later traveled throughout the country to provide cleft lip surgery to children.

In order to perform these operations, she traveled to Central Lombok, East Lombok, Cibadak, Pangkal Pinang in Bangka, Sukabumi, Lampung, Soe in East Nusa Tenggara, Manado, Pelabuhan Ratu and Madiun.

Since she joined the foundation in 2002, Audy has treated 160 children with cleft lips.

Cleft lips can also affect the palate inside the mouth, which can be life-threatening. The condition is sometimes referred to as cleft lip and palate congenital deformity, or "harelip".

"Surgery to the palate inside the mouth is dangerous as it can cause heavy bleeding."

Audy was born on August 8, 1963, in Makassar, South Sulawesi, and completed her elementary and high school education in Jakarta.

Her family moved to West Nusa Tenggara when she was in elementary school, but Audy decided to stay in the capital.

"I wanted a good education, and at the time only schools in Jakarta could offer that," she recalled, adding she stayed in her family home with her aunt as guardian.

"My father is an architect and he wanted me to follow in his footsteps."

But she did not aspire to be an architect; she instead studied medicine at the University of Indonesia, much to her father's disappointment.

After graduation she left for East Nusa Tenggara province to serve her compulsory state duty from 1988 to 1992.

She was posted at a Puskesmas in Camplong district, about 48 kilometers from the provincial capital of Kupang, before moving to Puskesmas Oekabiti in Kupang regency.

"I chose East Nusa Tenggara as I did not want to go to West Nusa Tenggara where my family resided," she said, adding that she did not want to live in her father's shadow—a renowned architect in the region.

She choose to become a specialist in plastic and reconstruction surgery—over general surgery—and enrolled again at the University of Indonesia.

Since 1998, Audy has worked as a plastic and reconstruction surgeon at Fatmawati Hospital.

Although she did not intend to marry a doctor, her destiny proved otherwise. She married Y. H. Haksanto, an anesthetist who works at the same hospital. They have one daughter.

Audy says that a surgeon in Indonesia cannot earn a sufficient

wage from performing reconstructive surgery alone.

She earns extra money through performing cosmetic surgery.

Audy says cases of cleft lip in Indonesia, which is both physically and mentally distressing for sufferers, seriously threatens the lives of many children.

She says more plastic and reconstruction surgeons should dedicate their time to this cause.

"Every year roughly 7,000 children are born with cleft lips in Indonesia," said Audy, adding that plastic and reconstruction surgeons manage to help only about half of these children every vear.

Those who wish to donate to Obor Berkat Indonesia Foundation can call 021-89905955/89905940 or visit its website at http://www.obi.or.id/ to learn more about its activities. The foundation's address is *Jl. Sriwijaya Kav. V-VII, Lippo Cikarang.* •

First published by The Jakarta Post, June 6, 2007

Luthfi Gatam: Helping People with Scoliosis

hen 18-year-old Sandra* underwent a medical checkup under the supervision of orthopedic spine surgeon Dr. Luthfi Gatam, her scoliosis was already in a severe condition.

"Her scoliosis was 135 degrees asymmetrical," recalled Luthfi of the curvature in her spine.

"She had been extremely distressed and had almost no confidence, as she could not avoid people who looked at her with disrespect and humiliation. She really had a hard time at school," he said.

"While such a scoliosis can never be fully corrected, intervention is still needed to ease those with this abnormal physicality," he said.

Medically speaking, as the curve in her spine measured over 40 degrees, Sandra had no choice but surgery.



"Now she is a happy and energetic young woman, going to college with a high level of confidence. Her height is now around 180 centimeters, very tall for an average Indonesian woman," Luthfi told The Jakarta Post, showing before-after surgery pictures.

"Her scoliosis has been corrected to around 50 percent, which technically can be considered satisfactory," he said.

Scoliosis is a condition in which the spinal column has abnormal lateral curves that affect the alignment of the torso over the pelvis.

Most cases are idiopathic scoliosis — or scoliosis with unknown causes—and most affect adolescent females.

Luthfi lamented that many people in Indonesia were unfamiliar with this physical condition, which can be socially disturbing for people with scoliosis. In addition, scoliosis is often "allowed" to develop further because of a lack of intervention, and advanced scoliosis can be physically perilous, sometimes life-threatening.

"This is because of low public awareness," he said.

Luthfi recalled his stint in 1990 at a Lampung community health center (puskesmas), where he fulfilled his governmentrequired residency. He said the center received inadequate communication from the Health Ministry about the importance for its School Health Unit (UKS) to conduct a simple spinal screening at schools.

Citing a 1994 research covering 2,000 elementary school students at 30 schools, he said the research revealed that 30 percent of the research group had light scoliosis of up to 20 degrees, 25 percent had scoliosis of 20-40 degrees and 2 percent of more than 40 degrees.

Born Jan. 23, 1959, Luthfi completed his primary and secondary education in Jakarta, and graduated in 1985 from the medical school at Bandung's Padjajaran University. He specialized in orthopedic surgery at the University of Indonesia (UI), from where he graduated in 1996.

His interest in the spine and its pertinent irregularities

developed when he discovered that spinal irregularities posed many challenges, ranging from the low local awareness of scoliosis to the degree of intricacy necessary in performing spinal surgery.

As president of the Pedicle Club Indonesia (PCI, www. pedicleclub.com), which groups all 32 Indonesian spine surgeons, he led his colleagues on a campaign and surgery road show throughout the country.

He told of an appalling experience he and his team had when they performed scoliosis surgery at a private hospital in Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan.

"There was no ICU (intensive care unit) and the equipment was extremely inadequate," said Luthfi.

Due to the absence of a machine that lowers hypertension—which is necessary in open surgery to prevent blood loss—Luthfi anxiously kept his eyes wide open all night to ensure that his patient's post-surgery condition remained stable.

The PCI, which was established in 1998, also works in public education and in the provision of spine surgery equipment, said Luthfi, who has three children with his wife, physician Dr. Nanny L. Gatam.

He noted that several media groups and non-governmental organizations, including the Tse Chi Buddha Foundation, are regular donators to their cause.

One of the key benefits of the PCI was that hospitals, including Fatmawati General Hospital where Luthfi works, could contact the specialist surgeons when patients from low-income families needed spine surgery.

However, Luthfi stressed that it was crucial to boost public awareness, as early intervention remained the best solution for scoliosis. Hence, the Health Ministry, healthcare providers and non-governmental organizations needed to work hand-in-hand to implement an effective campaign, he said, and that school screening was likely the best target of such a program.

While scoliosis is found in any society and societal segment,

Luthfi is currently pursuing another doctorate at his alma mater, UI, looking at the correlation between the degree of scoliosis, social demographics and post-surgery success.

Detecting scoliosis

Several different "warning signs" can be detected to help determine if you or someone you love has scoliosis.

Should you notice one or more of these signs, you should schedule a more thorough examination with your doctor.

- Shoulders are different heights—one shoulder blade is more prominent than the other
- Head is not centered directly above the pelvis
- Appearance of a raised, prominent hip
- Rib cages are at different heights
- Uneven waist
- Changes in appearance or texture of skin overlying the spine (dimples, hairy patches, color changes)
- Leaning of entire body to one side •

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^{*} All patient names in this article are aliases Source: www.iscoliosis.com/symptoms.html •

Raising Awareness on Scoliosis, Its Treatment

ntil she reached 30 years of age, Dewi* was not aware that she had scoliosis, or a stunted spine. At a glance she looked physically normal.

However, when she bends down, upon careful observation her spine appears asymmetrical.

Dewi was shy about speaking of her condition.

"I once watched a person with scoliosis like me trying on a dress in a dress shop, and the shop attendant looked at her with weird-looking eyes," she said of what she described as humiliation.

She did not speak to anyone until she began to worry that this condition might eventually affect her physical appearance. When Dewi browsed the Internet, she found out that scoliosis is actually preventable at an earlier stage.

Another case concerns 12-year-old Nadia, who was diagnosed with scoliosis that had a 50-degree curvature.

Still another child with scoliosis said that it was extremely painful every time she sat down, which disrupted her school life.

Early intervention significantly helps people developing scoliosis, but shyness, low awareness and ignorance often allow for curve progression. The scoliosis thus worsens to the point that it can disturb normal life, which can range from breathing difficulties to premature death.

This is not to mention the social consequences resulting from their condition.

In the United States, a standard exam called Adam's Forward Bend Test is conducted by pediatricians and at initial school screenings. Parent volunteers or school nurses can run the test effortlessly by simply asking students to place their feet together and bend 90 degrees at the waist.

From this position, any abnormal spinal curvatures or asymmetry of the trunk can be easily observed and identified.

The test also exists in Indonesia, but implementation is another matter.

"Every community health center, or puskesmas, in our country has complete technical guidance for this school screening. However, people are still overwhelmed with other disturbing cases that seem to be pervasive, such as infant mortality and others, so almost no attention has been given to administering this simple test," said orthopedic spine surgeon Dr. Luthfi Gatam of Fatmawati General Hospital.

One research conducted by a postgraduate program at Yogyakarta's Gadjah Mada University shows that a physical educator can play a supervisory role in the early prevention of scoliosis.

Technically, scoliosis is more a descriptive term than a disease.

Curves are found in all spines of the human body; some curvature in the neck and upper and lower trunk is normal for assisting the upper body to maintain balance and its configuration over the pelvis.

Nevertheless, when the spinal column consists of abnormal lateral curves and affects the balance and alignment over the pelvis, this condition is referred to as scoliosis.

In the general population, scoliosis affects more women than men.

"The ratio is nine to one for (cases in) women to men. And it remains a mystery why it affects mostly women," said Luthfi.



Causes of general scoliosis include congenital spine deformities, genetic conditions, neuromuscular problems, limb length inequality, cerebral palsy, spina bifida (a birth defect affecting the neural tube), muscular dystrophy, spinal muscular atrophy and tumors.

But roughly 80 percent of scoliosis have no known cause, or idiopathic.

Idiopathic scoliosis is often found in healthy people "regardless of people's social strata, and many are found in people with 'yellow' skin like us rather than 'black'", said Luthfi.

Idiopathic scoliosis is categorized by age: infantile (children aged 3 and under), juvenile (3-9 years old), adolescent (10-18), and adult (post-skeletal development over 19).

"However, at post-skeletal development, usually there won't be any curve progression, except for in those who already have a 50-degree curvature," said Luthfi.

Around the world, adolescent idiopathic scoliosis (AIS), which develops in young adults generally at the onset of puberty, represents approximately 80 percent of idiopathic scoliosis cases.

No comprehensive statistics are available in Indonesia, but research by noted orthopedic surgeon Prof. Subroto Sapardan reveals that from 1977 to 2006, 2,010 scoliosis cases were treated at Fatmawati General Hospital.

"Most of the patients were female adolescents, and 600 of them were so bad that they had to undergo surgery," said Luthfi.

He explained that surgery is not always necessary to correct scoliosis, depending on the condition of the patients.

"If a Cobb angle is below 20 degrees, we only observe them. From 20 to 40 degrees we give them a brace, but if it is more than 40 degrees, open surgery will be highly considered," he said.

The Cobb angle is the measurement of the degree of curvature in the spine.

However, the causes of idiopathic scoliosis remain unknown.

"Different theories concerning its etiology have been proposed and studied extensively. Genetic factors, hormonal factors, growth abnormalities, biomechanical and neuromuscular disorders of bone, muscle and fibrous tissue, have all been proposed as possible causes of scoliosis," Luthfi said.

Those with a family history of spinal deformity are also at greater risk for developing scoliosis.

For example, one patient whose spine requires a brace said her mother also had scoliosis, although with a spinal curvature of 1 to 10 degrees, this was not really disturbing. Meanwhile, her younger sister's spine was likewise obviously lop-sided, she said.

But spine surgery to correct scoliosis can be scary for patients of any age, especially when faced with a five- to seven-day recovery period, post-operative pain and the anxiety caused by knowing that they will be left with a long scar.

In the U.S., Dr. George Picetti, a highly specialized adult and pediatric spine surgeon at the Sutter Medical Center's neuroscience medical group and institute in Sacramento, California, has developed a minimally invasive approach to scoliosis treatment.

The technique he developed is known as thoracoscopic instrumentation, which utilizes video technology to correct certain types of spinal curves: extremely tiny incisions are made through

which the surgeon corrects the scoliosis by using an endoscope. This has minimized incision scarring and decreased the amount of dent to tissue and blood loss during surgery.

"But it is a time-consuming operation and is very expensive. Normally, (the operation) takes around eight hours," said Luthfi of the minimally invasive spine surgery.

He himself had conducted the procedure only twice throughout his career, both at the Bintaro International Hospital in Tangerang, Greater Jakarta.

However, according to Luthfi, Fatmawati General Hospital, which is known as an "orthopedic hospital", has all the necessary equipment for open surgery, from the simplest to the most complicated surgical procedures.

Orthopedic surgeon Subroto invented in 1998 the "UI System" for segmental instrumentation in scoliosis surgery, so named after the University of Indonesia (UI). In this system, a rod and a reconstruction plate are inserted to either side of the spine and screwed together.

The UI System, which was patented on Sept. 2, 2004 (Patent Reg. No. 0.011.170), provides three-dimensional correction, stable instrumentation with no external support and can result in a balanced spine.

Perhaps more importantly for a developing country like Indonesia where poverty is prevalent, the procedure is relatively inexpensive.

According to Subroto, the UI System has helped people with scoliosis across the country effectively and affordably.

"It only costs Rp 4 million. Two hundred and eighty patients with severe scoliosis have used this (system) at our hospitals ... and hundreds more at other hospitals, as this system has been launched internationally," Luthfi added.

He said more and more hospitals in Indonesia are now offering spine surgery for people with scoliosis.

Another aspect that should not be overlooked in treating

scoliosis is the emotional impact of the condition on patients.

"We have to convince the patients that they can finally lead a normal life," Luthfi stressed.

Psychologists should thus be retained to counsel patients through their post-surgery mental and emotional conditions to help restore their self-confidence. This can be carried out simultaneously with yoga or swimming as rehabilitative treatments.

Luthfi pointed out that public education to increase awareness of scoliosis was also important, because some people with the condition would not recover completely - and societies needed to learn to accept and embrace them wholeheartedly. •

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^{*} All patient names in this article are aliases.

Din Syamsuddin: A Man to Watch



he presidential election is still two years away, but political intrigues among the country's elites have already begun.

In March, for example, chairman of Muhammadiyah, Din Syamsuddin, was reportedly involved in the establishment of Baitul Muslimin, an Islamicoriented economic wing of the

nationalist Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P).

The move prompted raised eyebrows among Muhammadiyah members, who see any cooperation with a secular nationalistic political party as something unusual.

Established on Nov. 8, 1912 in Yogyakarta, Muhammadiyah is the second largest Islamic organization in Indonesia with 30 million members. The largest is Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which claims to have some 40 million members.

PDI-P, on the other hand, is one of the biggest political parties in the country. Its chairwoman, Megawati Soekarnoputri, is expected to join the 2009 election.

Din denied suggestions he was eying the post of vice president in the upcoming election.

"I have never been requested by PDI-P or Ibu Mega to be the party's vice presidential candidate," Din once said.

Sure, and there are no permanent friends and enemies in politics.

Recently, Din invited Jakarta governor hopeful Adang Daradjatun, who is backed by the conservative Islamic-oriented Justice Welfare Party (PKS), to his house for a meeting.

Din has insisted that Muhammadiyah, as a religious organization, has no structural organizational relations with any political parties. "But that doesn't mean we have to keep our distance from political parties... as they still play an important role in opening access to decision-making both in parliament and the executive," he said during the meeting.

Nevertheless, Muhammadiyah members have become increasingly uneasy with the apparent infiltration of a political ideology into the organization, which prompted Din to issue a decree warning members that PKS was a political party aiming to grab power.

The decree also reiterated the organization's non-political commitment by forbidding the establishment of a political party using Muhammadiyah's name and symbol.

Traditionally, many Muhammadiyah members have been actively involved in politics and significant numbers can be found in both the executive and parliament.

Even the National Mandate Party (PAN), which many regarded a "Muhammadiyah" political party, has somewhat failed to significantly woo and unite Muhammadiyah members.

"Any outside infiltration into non-political organizations and development of new thoughts are not new phenomena and happen not only in Muhammadiyah," Din told The Jakarta Post at his residence, an hour before the arrival of Adang and his entourage.

Born on Aug. 31, 1958, in Sumbawa Besar, West Nusa Tenggara province, Din grew up in an NU family. He spent his elementary and junior secondary education in NU schools as his father was a chairman of IPNU (NU Students' Association).

At his uncle's request, Din enrolled at the Gontor pesantren in East Java, where he became acquainted with the late Nurcholish Madjid, a moderate and prominent Islamic intellectual who

opened his mind to the plurality of the Islamic school of thoughts.

He later studied at IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Islamic College and became chairman of Pemuda Muhammadiyah, or the Muhammadiyah Youth Wing, from 1989 to 1993.

Fluent in English, Arabic and French, Din was awarded a Fulbright scholarship and studied at the University of California Los Angeles, earning a PhD in political science. His thesis is titled Islam and Politics in Islam: The Case of Muhammadiyah in Indonesia's New Order.

Din was active in the Golkar party for six years from 1993 to 1998 and served as a member of the Karya Pembangunan Faction from 1997 to 1998 in the country's highest political body—the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR).

Din was also appointed as director general of Manpower Placement at the Manpower Ministry.

As an activist, Din became deputy chairman of Muhammadiyah under the leadership of Syafi'i Ma'arif.

On July 7, 2005, during the 45th Muktamar of Muhammadiyah, Din was elected as chairman of Muhammadiyah with 1,718 votes, replacing Syafi'i Maarif, a moderate Muslim leader widely respected both in Indonesia and abroad for his consistency in upholding his principles.

Din was believed to have won the votes of the increasingly strong conservative elements of the organization. Nevertheless, not along after he was elected, Din bewildered those who supported him by announcing that Christians could use Muhammadiyah schools or buildings to perform their prayers, at a time when many churches were being attacked and vandalized by Islamic hard line groups.

He said he understood those who wanted to apply shariah or Islamic laws in the country, but shariah should be understood in a broader manner.

"Islamic shariah is an Islamic teaching that emphasizes akhlak (good deeds)," he said, adding that treating shariah as a mere law

is a gross reduction of Islamic values.

"Even (state ideology) Pancasila is already Islamic and could serve as a kalimatun sawa (common platform) in this pluralistic country," he said, adding opposition to sharia is also an antidemocratic attitude.

Din, who is also president of the Asian Conference for Religion and Peace (ACRP)—with its headquarters in Tokyo, Japan believes most Indonesian Muslims are not interested in extreme liberalism and religious fundamentalism.

This is the reason he launched the Center for Dialogue and Cooperation among Civilizations (CDCC).

"We continue to encounter prejudices, misconceptions and misunderstandings among people of different religions and civilizations, especially between Islam and Christian West... we believe the prejudices and misconceptions among people of different faiths can be eradicated by persistent dialogue and cooperation," he said during the center's launch, which was marked by a public lecture by Defense Minister Juwono Sudarsono. •

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Raising Awareness of Prosthetics, Orthotics (Part 1 of 2)



worked as a cashier in a modest textile shop in Tanah Abang, North Jakarta, was on way to work when the Metro Mini (public bus) she was riding was hit on its rear left by another, speeding bus.

Riska, sitting in a rear seat, was sandwiched between the metal door and body of the bus, her leg crushed.

She had to have her leg amputated from above the knee. She did not receive any compensation from the bus company.

Now, using a transfemoral prosthesis, Riska is still able to work. Her superiors at the same textile shop have placed her where she did not need to walk much.

A transfemoral prosthesis is an artificial limb that replaces a leg from knee to foot.

"Most of the cases of people who needed artificial limbs, I think around 60 percent, are caused by accidents—mostly traffic accidents and the rest, work-related accidents," said medical rehabilitation specialist Dr. Peny Kusumastuti, who is head of the Medical Rehabilitation division at Fatmawati General Hospital, which was established in 1970.

"Others are caused by diseases like polio, diabetes, bone cancer and severe infections," she added.

Peny further lamented that no comprehensive national statistics

were available with regard to prosthetics and orthotiscs cases.

Hospital records show that it handled 376 cases of prosthetics and orthotics in 2004, 38 cases in 2005, and 439 cases in 2006.

A prosthesis is an artificial extension that replaces a missing part of the body. Traumatic injuries and congenital defects are characteristic causes that require supportive equipment for the disabled to pursue normal lives.

The complete recovery of range of movement, however, is not always achievable.

In developing countries, vehicular and industrial calamities, as well as conflicts, are the leading causes of amputations. In more developed countries, amputations are generally required due to diseases such as cancer, infections and circulatory diseases.

Following independence, Indonesia saw many of its freedom fighters receiving treatment for amputations at the first medical rehabilitation hospital in Surakarta, Central Java. The hospital was established by the "founding father" of medical rehabilitation, Prof. Dr. Suharso, who specialized in prosthetics in the U.K.

Now, 62 years after independence with the rush of investment and material development, but still with an "underdeveloped" mentality where safety is still largely ignored, traffic and work-related accidents appear to dominate prosthetic cases.



This is evident in many cases found in general hospitals such as Fatmawati and Cipto Mangunkusumo. However, other causes are also noticeable, such as diabetes, cancer and even congenital amputation.

Although relatively infrequent, cases of congenital amputation need assiduous treatment at an early stage, so that the patient can "feel" they have a normal life during growth.

For example, 7-year-old Iwan had a below-knee congenital amputation.

"Because he is still growing, we have to produce a new transtibial prosthesis every six months," said prosthetist and orthotist Sumedi of Fatmawati General Hospital.

A prosthetist is a specialist who designs and fits prostheses to the remaining limbs of amputees; an orthotist is one who designs and applies an external device to a part of the body to correct any malformation.

Both specialists technically design, measure, fabricate, fit and service prostheses or orthoses under the prescription of a physician.

Sumedi, who started working at the hospital in 1976, invited The Jakarta Post to tour his workshop at the hospital to see how prostheses are made.

Some factors taken into account when producing prostheses include energy storage and return, energy absorption, ground compliance, rotation, weight and suspension.

Initially, a prosthetist would work with gypsum on an affected part of the body, he said.

A socket that fits the stub of the limb is needed when fitting for lower-limb prostheses. Carbon fiber or glass infused with acrylic resin is used to make the socket, which is later linked to a foot assembly.

An aluminum tube with a two-part pyramidal alignment, with one device at each end, functions as connecting gears for the artificial limb.

The ankle and the socket are connected by two devices each. In order to support the patient's weight and to avoid any tangential

movement, the foot is initially allowed to be in proper position.

Prosthetists then observe the way the patients walk. They jot down the positions when the leg is lifted, as well as when the toes lift off and the heel strikes the ground, and later correct anything considered deviant.

Depending on the affected limb, prostheses have four prime non-natural limb parts: transtibial, transfemoral, transradial and transhumeral.

An artificial limb that replaces a leg missing below the knee is called a transtibial prosthesis. Because the knee is largely retained, movement is still relatively easier than those with a transfemoral amputation.

Hence, transtibial amputees can regain normal movement with a prothesis.

An artificial limb that replaces a leg missing from above the knee is called a transfemoral prosthesis, and those with this condition must use more to walk than a person with two normal legs.

"Since the knee is somewhat broken or disturbed, learning to walk with a normal movement could be a hardship for a transfemoral amputee," said Sumedi, who has many years of experience with such patients.



An artificial limb that replaces an arm missing below the elbow is a transradial prosthesis, and one that replaces an arm missing from above the elbow is a transhumeral prosthesis.

Due to the similar complexities of elbow and knee movement, transhumeral amputees may undergo similar problems as transfemoral amputees when learning to use their prothesis.

While a prosthesis replaces a missing limb, an orthosis is a device that is applied externally to a part of the body to correct a malformation, improve function or mitigate symptoms of a disease by supporting or assisting the musculo-neuro-skeletal system, such as a brace.

"Orthoses are mostly needed by those with polio, stroke, nerve breakdown and also scoliosis," explained Sumedi.

The medical field concerned with the manufacture and application of orthoses is known as orthotics.

Sumedi recalled his experience with a 10-year-old girl who had scoliosis of 35 degrees asymmetrical.

Scoliosis is a condition when the spinal column displays abnormal lateral curves, which can affect the balance and alignment of the torso over the pelvis. Surgery, braces or chiropractic treatments are available to deal with scoliosis, but are very much dependent on the degree of scoliosis.

"Our medical rehabilitation specialist prescribed that she use a Milwaukee brace. She was a determined young girl, taking off her brace only when she took a bath. After 12 years of treatment, her scoliosis has been corrected to 5 degrees. It is almost a miracle. She is now a normal girl," Sumedi recalled of his patient, who would cry if her orthosis was taken away from her.

Before the 1997-98 economic crisis, the hospital's workshop had produced prostheses and orthoses on a regular basis and in mass, "but many were left unused because many did not fit the size of the patients," said Sumedi.

As the government subsidy became increasingly restricted, the hospital was forced to find ways to produce prostheses and orthoses in a more economical way.

It opted to use a collaborative mechanism, called UKS (Usaha Kerja Sama), where the prosthetists and orthotists of the workshop were to produce a number of products based on need or on an ad hoc basis.

"We produced 234 prostheses and orthoses in 2002, 231 in 2003, 376 in 2004, 461 in 2005 and 439 in 2006," said Sumedi, citing statistics.

They also accepted orders from other hospitals, he said.

"Many of the patients here are from low-income families," added medical rehabilitation specialist Dr. Ria Tobing, so they tried to make prices as affordable as possible.

Another prosthetist-orthotist, Bebeng, concurred.

The use of local material for a below-knee prosthesis for an adult would cost Rp 1,500,000 (US\$), including servicing. The same prosthesis could cost up to Rp 9,000,000 if produced using imported material.

When low-income patients undergo physiotherapy as part of their a post-surgery rehabilitation, the hospital's social workers are tasked with contacting donors to contribute in producing the prostheses.

"It is unfortunate that many insurance companies and even the government-sanctioned ASKESKIN only cover surgery, not prostheses and orthoses," said Peny, referring to the national insurance scheme for the poor.

Peny asserted that the policy should change, as coverage for prostheses and orthoses would greatly help patients from lowincome families lead a more productive life and contribute to society. •

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^{*} All patient names in this article are aliases.

Life-Long Friends Tied by Prosthetics (Part 2 of 2)

Prosthetist and orthotist Sumedi started working at Fatmawati General Hospital in 1976 as an assistant to senior prosthetists.

A prosthetist designs, measures, fabricates, fits and services prostheses as prescribed by a medical rehabilitation specialist; an orthotist is a medical technician who designs and applies an external device to a part of the body to correct deformities.

"I initially aspired to be an engineer, but God destined me to become a `foot engineer'," Sumedi said, smiling, during an interview with The Jakarta Post at his home.

Born Oct. 14, 1955, Sumedi is married with two children.



He said many prosthetists and orthotists of his generation did not receive any formal training at tertiary institutions, as the subject did not exist in the country.

Only in April 2007 Health Minister Siti Fadilah Supari officially opened the Surakarta Health Polytechnic (Poltekes), which operates under the ministry.

The polytechnic has a prosthetics and orthotics program with a specifically designed competency-based curriculum and professional teaching equipment.

Even without formal training, however, Sumedi's expertise is unquestionable.

"I learned both from quality courses here and abroad, and through many years of experience as an assistant to the senior prosthetists and orthotists at the hospital," said Sumedi, who is a member of Indonesian Orthotist and Prosthetist Association (IOPI).

Sumedi has also participated in various training courses which include the six-month International Prosthetics and Orthotics Training in Taiwan (1980), the Myoelectric Below-Elbow Hand Prosthesis Training held by Otto Bock Scandinavia and the Health Ministry in Jakarta (1990), the 100-hour Paramedic Training held by Health Ministry (1993), and the two-week Medical Rehabilitation Training held by the ministry (2001).

Sumedi has not kept a record of the number of prosthetics and orthotics patients for whom he has fitted and serviced artificial limbs during his career, "but it must have been hundreds", he said.

And as prostheses need regular servicing, Sumedi often developed close ties with the patients. One such life-long patient is Sumani.

Sumedi first met a disabled Sumani in 1978, when the latter started working at a wheelchair company associated with Fatmawati hospital.

The two live in Pondok Labu, South Jakarta, an area relatively close to the hospital. Sumani now works as a welder at a workshop near Sumedi's residence.



For many years Sumedi, has checked and serviced regularly Sumani's transtibial prosthesis—an artificial limb replacing a leg missing below the knee.

Thirty years ago during a red-eye delivery to Muntilan, Magelang, an exhausted Sumani, then a truck driver, lost control of the vehicle and slammed into a mahogany tree. He survived the accident, but his left leg was amputated below the knee at the Army Hospital in Magelang.

Sumani stayed at home for a year, frustrated and depressed, until social workers from the Health Ministry approached and encouraged him to undergo a special education program for the disabled being held at the Prof. Dr. R. Suharso Hospital in Surakarta (Solo), Central Java.

"The social workers back then were very active in looking for the disabled to place in training centers for free—they even provided free accommodations and meals," Sumani told the Post at Sumedi's home. He added that the present government should also pay more attention to disabled individuals from poor families like himself.

At that time, the Suharso training center for the disabled was the biggest of its kind in Southeast Asia.

"They offered various training courses such as carpentry, welding and electronics. I chose the welding course," said Sumani, who participates in the Association for Indonesia's Disabled (PPSI).

"The center drew many people from across the country, including some veterans of the East Timor war," he recalled.



Sumani, born Aug. 8, 1950, joined the one-year training program at the Suharso center. Upon his successful completion, Sumani was sent to Jakarta to work at the wheelchair factory.

"I once invited Sumani to be a model during a prosthetics workshop so that he could get a new prosthesis for free," said prosthetist Sumedi, followed by Sumani's laughter.

Sumani, who still looks and energetic and high-spirited, showed the Post his amputated leg and transtibial prosthesis.

He gently tapped his knee, which remained intact and strong. The lingering limb extended about 20 centimeters from the knee.

"I can still drive a car," he claimed proudly, putting the artificial limb on his leg, then pushing it against the ground to snap it in place. •

Mothers Strive to Support Children with CP

eni Kusumawati didn't think that her first child would be anything other than a healthy baby. When the estimated due date came, she didn't feel any symptoms of labor, nor was she severely ill, so her doctor advised that Peni wait a little longer.

"But my (uterine) membrane had ruptured before I delivered my baby girl, Yasmin Azzahra Rahman. Later it was found out that the amniotic fluid was contaminated by my daughter's feces. She was overdue," Peni told The Jakarta Post.

Yasmin was diagnosed with athetoid cerebral palsy (CP), which results in involuntary, uncontrolled and uncoordinated movements of the muscles. All limbs are affected with jerky movements, and the child might also stumble when walking due to poor coordination.



For years and almost daily, Yasmin has undergone intensive physio- and occupational therapy, mostly at Pela 9 rehabilitation center in South Jakarta. She has also been prescribed at-home rehabilitation exercises.

Neurologist Dr. Dwi Putro of Bintaro International Hospital said that Yasmin had the potential to walk, although she would not walk as normally as other children.

Recently, the 7-year-old took her first steps with a walker.

Yasmin, who has two healthy, normal younger brothers, just began school at SDN 04 Cipete Selatan State Elementary School in Cipete, South Jakarta.

The school is an ordinary one, but it accepts children with special needs under the government's sekolah inklusi (inclusive school) program.

Although government support is still limited, Peni is upbeat. "I am ready to cooperate with the school to provide more necessary support for my daughter," she said as she accompanied Yasmin to her first day at school.

With an IQ of 119, Yasmin has difficulty writing because of athetoid CP, but she is able to read and is considered able enough to compete among other students who have no physical disabilities.

That a child with CP can succeed academically is evident in the example of wheelchair-bound Susanne Ongkowidjaja, who recently graduated from the English Department of the Education Faculty at Pelita Harapan University.

Susanne has both quadriplegic and hemiplegic CP—her four limbs are all affected, but the right side of her body is more severely affected.

Her mother, German-born Traute Ongkowidjaja, also had a ruptured uterine membrane prior to delivering Susanne, her first child. She was unaware that Susanne had cerebral palsy until her daughter was a year old.

"I gave my daughter therapy by myself," Traute said during an interview held at The Jakarta Post.



(Photo: The Jakarta Post)

The treatment Traute administered comprised of Voita and Bobath. In Voita, she pressed certain spots of Susanne's body to stimulate the cells, while under the Bobath Concept she assisted Susanne in physical games and exercises to improve posture and reduce muscular stiffness.

Susanne, whose two younger sisters are health and without disabilities, attended SDN 09 Kayu Putih Siemens

State Elementary School in

Pulomas, East Jakarta. From the first to fourth grades, Susanne was accompanied and assisted by an aide studying at a teacher's college, who would lift up her body when she played.

"And I sat by the door of the class to help write the lesson," recalled Traute.

After undergoing an operation in Germany to fix her hip in 1993, Susanne attended the internationally oriented Cita Buana school in South Jakarta until she graduated high school in 2002.

"I had a difficult time as my (peers) seemed reluctant to approach and play with me, but my teachers were marvelous, as they treated me as if my wheelchair did not exist," the selfconfident Susanne said in fluent English.

She finally earned her peers' respect during a fund-raising event at the Wisma Subud residential compound in 1999, when she succeeded in collecting a significant amount of money using a custom-designed tricycle.

Traute pushed her daughter to continue studying, and surveyed several universities in Jakarta—only to find that they had too many stairs, which can be troublesome for her daughter.

She said she then had a dream that "instructed" her to take Susanne somewhere in Karawaci.

So she enrolled Susanne at Pelita Harapan University, which had facilities that were more comfortable and suitable for her daughter.

"But I was bit shocked and sad during the first days at the university, because the lecturers always left the class immediately after lecturing," said Susanne, who turned 25 in March.

At university, Susanne regularly posted her essays on a "wall magazine" until people became aware of her potential.

She aspires to become an editor or translator, and added that she intended to submit some pieces to the Post.

She also participated in religious activities at Pelita Harapan.

"That is why Susanne has become very forgiving, particularly of her mother who has made a lot of mistakes...," smiled Traute, followed by Susanne's chuckling. •

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Raising Awareness on Cerebral Palsy, Its Treatment

ina (an alias) experienced difficulties when delivering her first baby at a hospital in her hometown.

As the baby would not come out, the attending doctor decided to use a vacuum to extract it.

However, the umbilical cord had become wrapped around the baby's neck in her uterus, and during the procedure his oxygen supply was cut off. When the baby was finally born, he didn't cry and his body was convulsing. He had gone into a coma from oxygen deprivation and needed to be placed in intensive care for a month following birth.

Later, it was found that his brain had been infected with cytomegalovirus, a type of herpes virus that Dina might have contracted during pregnancy.

Now 4.5 years old, Rangga (alias) has quadriplegic cerebral palsy. Dina diligently brings her son for therapy at Keanna, a private rehabilitation center in Cilandak, South Jakarta.





His prognosis is not good, as he cannot move any part of his body, not even his eyes.

But Dina is an optimist. "There is progress," she told The Jakarta Post, adding that she was ecstatic when Rangga finally smiled for the first time at her touch.

Cerebral palsy (CP) is a physical disorder resulting from non-genetic factors that cause brain damage, such as oxygen deprivation, infection and physical trauma, during or after pregnancy.

"The brain damage itself is non-progressive, but it can cause physical disorders," said pediatric neurologist Dr. Irawan Mangunatmadja of Cipto Mangunkusumo General Hospital in North Jakarta.

"It is a persistent, but not unchanging, disorder of movement and posture appearing in the early years of life," he said.

Several viruses can cause in utero brain damage such as TORCH, which stands for toxoplasma, rubella, cytomegalovirus (CMV) and herpes simplex virus II (HSV-II).

Toxoplasma is a genus of parasitic protozoa whose best host are cats; however, the vast majority of warm-blooded animals can carry it. The disease it causes, toxoplasmosis, can have fatal effects on a fetus during pregnancy.

The rubella virus causes rubella, or German measles. The virus is hard to detect, as it usually exhibits only mild symptoms or is asymptomatic.

Cytomegalovirus (CMV) is an ordinary virus and hardly ever causes noticeable disease, but it belongs to the herpes family, while HSV-II causes excruciating sores on the anus or genitals and may be dormant in nerve tissues.

Oxygen deprivation and a lack of nutrition channeled from the placenta to the fetus are also cited as possible causes of brain damage in the uterus; these also can cause low birth weight, viral encephalitis, brain tumors, head injuries and meningitis after birth.

"Generally, cerebral palsy can be categorized by the tonus,

or muscle rigidity, and areas of the affected body," said Irawan.

CP is mainly classified according to tonus into three types: spastic CP, athetoid CP and ataxic CP.

Spastic CP is regarded as the most common form, wherein the cerebral cortex—the region of the brain that controls thought movement and sensation—is damaged. In such cases, the arms are usually hang lifeless, and the hands are twisted against the forearm. Its effects on the legs can be noticed by the way the child walks, depending on the degree of severity.

Athetoid CP results in involuntary, uncontrolled and uncoordinated movements of the muscles, due to damage of the basal ganglion. Consequently, all limbs display jerky movements while the fingers and wrists are twisted. Due to poor coordination, the child might also stumble when walking.

Ataxic CP is the rarest of the three and results from damage to the cerebellum, which controls stability. A child with this type of CP will have difficulties with balance.

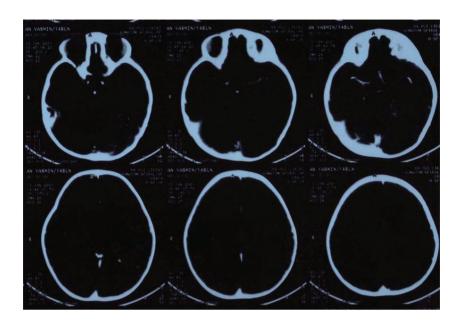
According to the affected areas of the body, CP is classified into hemiplegic CP, diplegic CP and quadriplegic CP.

Hemiplegic CP describes the condition when half of the body—such as the right arm and right leg, or the left arm and left leg—is affected. Almost all children with this form CP are able to walk, since spasticity mostly affects the arm.

Diplegic CP is indicated by the more severely affected lower limbs, which is commonly found in babies born prematurely, while in quadriplegic CP, all four limbs are severely affected.

Technology can help detect the degree of brain disorder through the computerized tomography (CT) scan or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).

The position emission tomography (PET) scan is used to identify any specific chemicals in the brain while the electroencephalogram (EEG) can also be useful in detecting brain disorders.



Children with CP are found in both developed and developing countries. In the 1970s and '80s, the number of children born with CP in developed countries declined, but appeared to rise after this period.

In the United States, CP occurs in 1.5 to four children per 1,000 live births; in Indonesia, about 2 percent of babies are born with delayed development, including cerebral palsy.

Various forms of rehabilitation can be helpful to children with CP, such as physical therapy, a standing frame to reduce spasticity, or the Bobath Concept to help the child physiologically through play to improve posture and reduce stiffness.

Aside from private rehabilitation centers in Jakarta, many hospitals, like Cipto Mangunkusumo General Hospital, Fatmawati General Hospital and Harapan Kita Hospital, have rehabilitation and treatment wards for children with delayed development.

"But parents cannot depend merely on treatment here," said therapist Retno of Cipto Mangunkusumo. "We (also) give them exercises to be done at home." While the child is encouraged to learn some skills, therapy is administered in stages.

"First, we have to relax their muscle rigidity through exercises before giving them functional exercises," said therapist Ahmad Syakib of Fatmawati hospital.

For example, he said, one patient with athetoid CP required exercises for coordination to treat involuntary movement.

"What we can do is to encourage them to be as independent as possible, since CP has no cure," said Ahmad.

As cerebral palsy is non-genetic, women with CP can still have healthy babies, and Ahmad gave as examples two adult female patients with CP who have normal and healthy children.

Nevertheless, some factors still hamper the proper treatment and handling of children with CP.

Irawan lamented that many parents appeared to have a low awareness of the condition, and when they notice that their children have some kind of delayed development, they preferred to adopt "alternative" treatments—until it was too late for a professionally designated rehabilitation program.

He added that the parents' financial situation could adversely impact CP therapy, and supporting public facilities remained almost nonexistent in Indonesia.

"What is also important is their chance to go to school, to have an education," added therapist

Novi of Cipto Mangunkusumo hospital.

Children with cerebral palsy have various degrees of learning problems; the most common are visual impairment, hearing impairment and difficulties with speech and language. Some are good at mathematics and reading, but poor at perceiving shapes.

The average intelligence quotient of a child with CP is 100, with many registering in the 70-80 IQ range.

But those with an IQ of 119 or above are usually able to excel in school, said psychologist Annie L. Perbowo of Harapan Kita hospital and the Pela 9 rehabilitation center.

The government has campaigned for sekolah inklusi (inclusive school), under which normal schools are to accept children with special needs. In 2003, 21 schools-from kindergarten to high school, including vocational high schools—across the five Jakarta districts participated in the program.

The campaign, however, is yet to be followed by concrete support from the government.

For example, the Post observed that a state elementary school in Bangka, South Jakarta, that accepts around five children with special needs every school year is not yet equipped with supporting facilities such as a special ramp and toilet. The school also has to arrange a special education teacher on its own.

It appears that no minimal standardization of school infrastructure and teaching staff exists for special needs children, such as those with cerebral palsy.

Further, several teachers at different schools did not have any understanding of cerebral palsy, merely grouping CP children among others with mental retardation or hearing and visual impairment. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, August 8, 2007

Ali Alatas: Veteran Diplomat Still in The Ring



as Indonesian Foreign Minister may have ended in 1999 after the country's brutal exit from East Timor—an event that deeply saddened him—but this does not mean that he has retired entirely from diplomatic activities.

Through the transitional governments that led the country from authoritarianism to democracy, Alex, who graduated

in 1956 from the Faculty of Law at the University of Indonesia, continued to play important roles in helping manage diplomatic affairs.

When Alwi Shihab was appointed Foreign Minister during Abdurrahman Wahid's presidency (1999-2001), Alex was assigned as special advisor to the minister. After the collapse of Wahid's government due to his erratic style, Alex was appointed foreign affairs advisor to President Megawati Soekarnoputri.

It was during Megawati's presidency (2001-2004) that Alex was sent to Sweden to discuss with that government the activities of the now defunct Free Aceh Movement (GAM), the leaders of which resided in that country.

Since May 2001, Alex has also been a member of the Experts and Eminent Persons Group of the ASEAN Regional Forum, which has recently succeeded in inserting a human rights clause in the

would-be ASEAN charter, despite opposition from Myanmar.

In 2003, Indonesia dispatched Alex to the pariah state, which has been a source of ASEAN's embarrassment, to negotiate the release of Myanmarese pro-democracy leader and Noble Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. Though the obstinate junta politely refused the release of the "iron lady", they painfully assured Alex of the safety and health of this brave woman, who has galvanized democracy movements around the world.

From 2005 to 2006, Alex was a member of the UN High Level Group of the Alliance of Civilization, and was a special advisor to the UN Secretary-General in 2006.

And since March 2007, he has been chairman of the Advisory Council to the President of the Republic of Indonesia.

Born on Nov. 4, 1932, in Jakarta, Alex initially aspired to become a lawyer, but he was destined to be a diplomat. Journalism once thrilled this veteran diplomat too—he was a journalist for the Niewsgierf daily (1952) and editor for the Aneta News Portal (1953-54).

Immediately following marriage, Alex was assigned as Secretary II in Bangkok (1956-1960), after which he held the post of Information and Cultural Relations Director at the Foreign Ministry (1965-66), then as Counselor of the Indonesian Embassy in Washington D.C. (1966-70).

Upon his return to Indonesia, he was again appointed Information and Cultural Relations Director, a post he held from 1970-72. His diplomatic star continued to rise as he was appointed Secretary of the Foreign Ministry Directorate General (1972-75), then Special Staff and Head of the Private Secretary to the Foreign Minister (1975-76).

Alex became the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Indonesia to the UN in Geneva from 1976-78, and on his return, was Secretary to the Vice President for four years. He was reassigned as Indonesia Permanent Representative from 1983-87, this time in New York.

He was finally appointed Foreign Minister for four

administrative terms spanning 1987-99, under presidents Soeharto and Habibie.

His impressive career in diplomatic posts saw a string of critical events in Indonesia's road toward respectable statehood.

As the country's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, he had to tackle unrelenting international criticism regarding Indonesia's invasion of East Timor and the subsequent allegations of human rights abuses, an issue he once dubbed as a "pebble in our shoes".

Without his diplomatic skills, Indonesia's reputation might have sunk even lower, particularly following the Santa Cruz incident of Nov. 12, 1991, during which many Timorese were killed. The image of Indonesian soldiers gunning down peaceful protesters was beamed around the world, and Alex was forced to calm the fuming international community.

"Diplomacy is like playing cards. Don't show them all, but drop them one by one," he once said.

He was thus bewildered when then president Habibie, apparently without first consulting him properly, announced that Indonesia would immediately grant East Timor a referendum.

While Alex was trying hard to leave behind the "diplomatic incident" of the loss of East Timor and the ensuing calamity, he was offered the aforementioned appointments that again demanded his diplomatic expertise and skills.

And Alex has no lack in words when commenting on pressing, contemporary international issues.

"Religion has been exploited in many of the world's conflicts," he told a group of journalists on the sidelines of a public lecture held last Wednesday in Jakarta, by the Center for Dialog and Cooperation among Civilizations (CDCC).

"There have been tensions and conflicts between the faithful of three monotheistic religions—Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Nevertheless, the root of the problem is not religion or culture, but political and economic grievances," he said.

"We live in an increasingly complex and volatile world. Our societies are still afflicted by ethnic and religious strife, by intolerance and prejudice, by misunderstanding and miscommunication and by intra-state and interstate violence," he continued.

"Polarized perceptions, fueled by injustice and inequality, have often led to conflict, threatening international peace and stability. Events of recent years have exacerbated mutual suspicion and contention, especially between Muslim and Western societies. This environment has been exploited by extremists throughout the world. There can be no doubt that this has become one of the defining issues of our times."

There should not only be persistent dialog, he stressed, but also tangible collaboration between different civilizations, such as in the area of economy.

A number of recommendations of the UN High Level Group of the Alliance of Civilization — of which Alex is a former member illustrate such an approach: the development of an objective and rational white paper on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; the reinvigoration of the stalled peace process; renewed commitment to multilateralism; consistent respect for international law; avoidance of double standards; combating poverty and economic inequalities through effective and concerted measures within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals.

"Unfortunately, the recent UN Secretary-General (Ban Kimoon) has not moved swiftly enough to heed the Alliance's recommendations," he lamented, and stressed that persistent publication of the recommendations needed to be pursued.

Alex might not be Foreign Minister any longer—and old age is inevitably snapping at his heels—but his highly active mind is still filled with clear ideas on how to help resolve conflicts and mitigate tensions in world politics.

His high-profile performance and established stature as a senior diplomat is a model for aspiring young diplomats who are eager to push the world's third-largest democracy in playing a more strategic role at both regional and international levels. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, August 13, 2007

Chiropractors Staying Ahead of Next Big Trend

n 2004, Anton (an alias) was diagnosed with herniated nucleus pulposus (HNP), a condition in which a disk is slipped along the spinal cord. The condition happens when all or part of the soft midpoint of a spinal disk is forced through a diluted part of the disk.

He said he could not walk, adding that the incident might have occurred while he was bungee jumping.

So he underwent surgery. But after four to six months his health deteriorated. Giving him only painkillers, the doctor advised he again undergo surgery, which scared him and his wife.





A friend suggested he undergo chiropractic treatment instead. "At first I didn't believe it. But I have made a lot of progress,"

Anton said at the Chiropractic di Indonesia clinic in the Jakarta Stock Exchange building.

The objective of the chiropractic profession is to detect and treat the mechanical disarray of the spine and musculoskeletal system. This is intended to enhance the nervous system, which could result in improved health.

The misalignment of the spine, which affects nerve flow, is called subluxation. This is when one or more of the vertebrae slip out of position and generate pressure on, or exasperate the spinal nerves. Spinal nerves are the nerves that come out from between each of the bones in the spine. The pressure on the nerves then results in nerve malfunction and obstructs the flow of the signals that run through the nerves.

If there is an obstruction of the signals running through the nerves, parts of the body will not get the proper messages and will operate improperly. This can adversely affect the function of various parts of the body and eventually the health.

A chiropractor diagnoses and fixes spinal subluxation. The correction is done through a procedure called an adjustment, which is a specific movement with direct careful pressure. The pressure allows the vertebrae to return to a more normal position and movement, thus smoothing the flow of nerve signals.

"We optimize the patient's health potential," said chiropractor Anthony K. Dawson from Chiropractic di Indonesia clinic.

"We believe that a body is a healing entity that has a selfregulatory system," said chiropractor Michael Cornish who works at the same clinic.

"That is the philosophy of the chiropractic profession."

Cornish, whose 80-year-old mother still plays tennis every week thanks to chiropractic care, explained the four phases of the degeneration of the spine.

Phase one is general misalignment. Phase two is when the disk starts to narrow as it is not being stimulated. Phase three is when the disk starts thinning and there is calcification in the joint spaces.

And phase four is when the joint space is made up of cartilage that has completely fussed.

The disk is the cartilage material located between the vertebrae, one of the small bones that forms the spine.

Stresses and strains and knocks and bumps sometimes result in such an imbalance. Thus, simple matters can cause subluxation, "such as the wrong sleeping, sitting or standing positions," said Tinah Tan of Citylife Chiropractic Care.

She said chiropractic care may assist in the management of a wide variety of health problems. However, people see chiropractic care as being for the following conditions: back pain, stiffness and pain in the neck, pain between the shoulder blades, tension headaches, migraines, disk problems, arm and leg pain, knee problems, sciatica, infant colic, other joint injures and numbness or pins and needles in the hands and feet.

Sciatica is sometimes harsh pain resulting from general compression and/or irritation of one of the five nerve roots that are branches of the sciatic nerve. The pain can be felt in the lower back, buttocks, and/or various parts of the leg and foot. Infant colic is a situation in which a baby cries or screams recurrently and for extended periods, without any perceptible explanation.

"Chiropractic care is very safe, even very gentle for children," added Cornish.

Normal childhood activities such as falls from a bike, sledding or playing ball can also result in subluxation in children's spines.

Tinah cited an example of a 6-year-old girl who was accidentally pushed hard by her friend from the back, causing severe subluxation. She has been undergoing chiropractic care and has progressed a lot.

Chiropractic, which is completely drug-free, can also help cure people with scoliosis.

Cornish cited the example of a 20-year-old woman with 34 degree curvature. The curvature was corrected to 17 degrees in less than a year after undergoing chiropractic care.

He also said pregnant women could benefit from chiropractic care. A number of studies have shown that pregnant women who have regular chiropractic care have shorter and less painful labors with fewer complications.

Unfortunately, despite an abundance of scientific research and positive patients' testimonials of chiropractic care, there is still a "jealousy gap" between ordinary medical treatment and chiropractic care, said Sukarto, the chairman of the Indonesian Chiropractic Association (Perchirindo), who studied chiropractic techniques in the U.S. in 1972.

He explained that even in the U.S.—the country where chiropractic was founded by Daniel David Palmer—it was not fully acknowledged for 100 years.

Palmer made a man who was nearly totally deaf hear again after fixing the man's bone back into place.

In Indonesia, it was only in 2003 that chiropractic was acknowledged by the Health Ministry as a "traditional treatment".

"We are now pushing to make chiropractic a complementary treatment," Sukarto said at his clinic.

Even in Indonesia in recent years there has been a rising demand for chiropractic care.

Sukarto initiated the establishment of Perchirindo after a serious incident in which a quack chiropractor committed malpractice before fleeing the country, giving a bad name to genuine and registered chiropractors with good records.

In 2006, the Health Ministry declared Perchirindo the official chiropractic association, giving it some important tasks: outlining guidelines for foreign chiropractors who are employed as consultants by local clinics, verifying the documents submitted by a clinic that intends to employ foreign chiropractors to ensure knowledge and skills transfer and coordinating with provincial/municipal health offices for evaluation and reporting to the Health Ministry.

Today, Perchirindo has two Indonesian chiropractors as members and twelve foreign chiropractors as associate members, meaning they are legally acknowledged by the Health Ministry.

"We are also planning to establish the first chiropractic school in Indonesia," said Sukarto, adding that the two-year-course would only accept local students who already held a bachelor of medicine.

"We will invite foreign academics and highly trained chiropractors to teach at our school," he added. To become a chiropractor in the U.S. or Australia one has to undergo five or six years of tertiary education. Many have become reliable partners of both general practitioners and specialists. Sukarto said it was imperative that an increased awareness of the benefits of chiropractic care was accompanied by a well designated education program and professionalism. •

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M. Syafi'i Anwar: Standing Up for Tolerance, Dialogue

n a country where people are grappling to live up to democratic values, standing firmly with a controversial principle can have dire consequences.

M. Syafi'i Anwar, for example, was branded a "CIA agent" and "Western puppet" by Islamic radicals here when he publicly denounced the fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), which deemed pluralism as "religiously unlawful" and driving the nation toward disintegration.



He received angry responses and threats via email, SMS and over the telephone. One big mosque in Jakarta even forbade him from giving speeches and sermons there, despite the fact Syafi'i is a renowned Muslim intellectual and activist whose contributions to the development of the mosque's youth movement have been well noted.

Nevertheless, Syafi'i believes Indonesia, as a newly democratic country, is still on the right track.

"I believe our government is committed to upholding religious tolerance. The problem is not really with the government but with certain Muslim communities who push their agendas through the use of threats and violence," said Syafi'i, referring to cases of attacks against religious minorities in the country.

"Law enforcers might be ambivalent in tackling this problem, but as long people are still free to express their opinions I am optimistic we are heading toward a genuine democracy where the rights of minorities will eventually be protected.

"We are still at the learning stage," he added.

Born on Sept. 27, 1953, in Kudus, East Java, Syafi'i received a law degree from the University of Indonesia in 1984, a Masters in political science from the same university in 1994 and a PhD in history and political sociology from the University of Melbourne, Australia, in 2005.

His doctoral dissertation was titled The State and Political Islam in Indonesia: A Study of State Politics and Modernist Muslim Leaders.

The former journalist and editor of Ummat and Panji Masyarakat magazines, whose hardworking style is still vividly recalled by his former colleagues, recently helped prepare, strengthen and update international standards against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other related intolerance.

After promotion by the Indonesian Permanent Mission to the UN led by Dr. Makarim Wibisono, Syafi'i was appointed by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour as the

representative for a group of Asian states in Geneva.

Other experts included Dimitrina Petrova of Bulgaria for the eastern European states, Tiyanjana Maluwa of Malawi for the African states, Jenny Goldschmidt of the Netherlands for Western Europe and other states and Luis Waldo Villapando of Argentina for Latin American and Caribbean regions.

Their task was to follow up the Durban Declaration and Program of Action adopted by the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in 2001, as requested by the intergovernmental working group, Human Rights Council (HRC), in its resolution adopted on June 30, 2006.

Under the declaration, groups that require special protection include religious groups, refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, migrant workers, internally displaced persons, ethnic-based communities, indigenous peoples, minorities and people under foreign occupation.

Syafi'i was specifically tasked with preparing complementary international standards in regard to religious groups and the manifestation of religious intolerance, the defamation of religious symbols, incitement to racial hatred and dissemination of hate speech and xenophobic sentiment.

"There are still certain implementation and substantive gaps with the international instrument on these issues," said Syafi'i, adding this has affected several countries' efforts in living up to democratic principles.

He cited religious and ethnic tensions, such as in Thailand, India and Indonesia.

"A comprehensive international instrument could help strengthen the commitment of member countries," he said, hoping after further debate the results would be raised to the level of a binding resolution.

Experts have recommended that a convention on human rights education be adopted to define the positive obligation of States

in regard to the incorporation of human rights education in their educational systems, including in private, religious, and military schools.

"I believe education would have a long-lasting impact on peoples' perceptions and attitudes," Syafi'i said.

This is understandable given Syafi'i's current position as the executive director of the Jakarta-based International Center for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP), whose current project "Distance Learning for Islamic Transformation through Pesantren" (Islamic boarding schools), with the support of the Ford Foundation (2007-2010), involves human rights education.

Experts have also recommended that "the treaty bodies consider adopting comments which would clarify the positive obligations of State parties regarding the adoption of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and provide relevant guidance for States".

Experts are of the opinion "there is an increase in religious intolerance and incitement to religious hatred. Equally well founded is the observation that religious intolerance and violation of the rights to freedom of religion have increased substantially in the aftermath of September 11, 2001".

"We highlighted that multicultural education could be strategically advantageous in combating religious intolerance," said Syafi'i, who also teaches interdisciplinary Islamic studies in the post-graduate department of the State Islamic University (UIN) in Jakarta.

Syafi'i was a Ford Foundation visiting scholar at the U.S. leading think tank, Brookings Institution, in Washington DC, from July to September 2007, an opportunity he used to express his criticism toward U.S. foreign policy.

Syafi'i said he could not agree more with Newsweek editor Farid Zakaria, that the U.S. "is seen as too arrogant, uncaring, and insensitive ... obsessed with its own notions of terrorism and has stopped listening to the rest of the world."

However, he said the U.S. policy to embrace moderate Muslims supported progressive liberal Islam, which is appropriate and needs to be continued in the future.

"I suggest the U.S. employ a smarter strategy to increase Indonesia's understanding of the U.S., with particular focus on the success stories of Muslims living in the U.S.," said Syafi'i, whose monograph The Interplay between U.S. Foreign Policy and Political Islam in Indonesia will soon be published by Brookings Institution. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, October 31, 2007

A.P.J Abdul Kalam: Great Scientist, People's President



vou are next, right? You are good people!" eminent scientist and former Indian president Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul

Kalam reminds reporters, while giving the thumbs-up sign.

Kalam was in Jakarta last week at the invitation of the Indonesian Institute of Science (LIPI) to speak at its national congress.

Evidently he had overcome any residual jetlag from his long flight from India. During the two hours of interviews, his mood remained jovial.

"India is a free and democratic country, so we always deal with the media," he said.

Known as a visionary leader for India, Kalam introduced three great visions for his country: freedom, development and standing up to the rest of the world.

"If we are not free, no one will respect us," he once said.

Kalam, who was widely referred to as the "People's President" in India, said that after 50 years of being a developing nation, "it is time to see ourselves as a developed nation. We are among the top five nations of the world in terms of GDP. We have a 10 percent growth rate in most areas. Our poverty levels are falling; our achievements are being globally recognized today."

Kalam said of his third vision: "I believe that unless India

stands up to the rest of the world, no one will respect us. Only strength respects strength. We must be strong not only as a military power but also as an economic power. Both must go hand-in-hand."

He is confident of India becoming a knowledge superpower and a developed nation by 2020, as set out in his book India 2020: A Vision for the New Millennium.

Many consider Kalam's work on India's nuclear weapons program as a way of asserting India's place as a would-be superpower. As former head of the giant Defense Research & Development Organization (DRDO), Kalam played a key role in the nuclear tests at Pokharan in the Rajasthan desert on May 11 and 13, 1998. Born on Oct. 15, 1931, in Dhanushkodi in Rameswaram district, Tamil Nadu, Kalam grew up on the island of Rameshwaram in south India, where his father had to rent his boats to pay his school fees.

Kalam said an elementary school teacher's drawing of a flock of seagulls had sparked his obsession with flight, which eventually led to his involvement in the development of India's guided missiles.

After graduating in science from St. Joseph's College in Tiruchi, Kalam enrolled in aeronautical engineering at the Madras Institute of Technology in 1954. He joined the DRDO, where he led a small team developing a prototype hovercraft, which never took off.

Kalam joined the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) in 1962, and between 1963 and 1982 participated in the satellite launch vehicle team at Thumba next to Trivandram.

He later became project director for SLV-3, where he supervised the launch of the Rohini satellite into orbit in July 1980.

Returning to the DRDO as its chief executive the following year, he was responsible for India's integrated guided missile development program, which envisaged the launch of five major missiles.

Kalam later became scientific advisor to the defence

minister and secretary of the Department of Defense Research & Development from 1992 to 1999, and was honored with the Bahart Ratna, India's highest civilian award, in 1997.

He became India's 11th president from 2002 to 2007. Kalam, who is a bachelor, vegetarian and teetotaler, is said to always have given full acknowledgment for India's success to his colleagues.

Also during his presidency he invented a development system called Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (PURA), which involves creating a well-balanced habitat that displays great biodiversity and greenery.

"Indonesia may have to design and develop more coastal and plain terrain PURA," said Kalam, who has received honorary degrees from as many as 30 universities.

When asked about one of his milestones, he cited his experience in the DRDO, when the very light material he and his team had produced was also utilized to make calipers, which weighed only 300 grams and were used for helping children with disabilities.

Kalam is a source of inspiration for many Indian youngsters, saying they are "the most powerful resource on the earth, under the earth and above the earth".

He said he was eager to share his experiences with Indonesia's best scientists because of the similarity between the countries in terms of diversity and plurality of ethnicity, religion, culture and language.

Kalam who recites passages from both the Koran and the Bhagvad Gita daily, once won a poll conducted by news channel CNN-IBN for India's best president. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, November 24, 2007

Twin Tolerations' Shaping Indonesia's Democracy: Stepan



of the Center for the Study of Democracy, Toleration and Religion (CDTR) at Columbia University in New York, was recently in Indonesia to address a discussion on "The World's Religious System and Democracy: Crafting the 'Twin Tolerations'", organized by the Center for Dialogues and Cooperation among Civilizations (CDCC) and the Paramadina

University. *The Jakarta Post's* contributor Alpha Amirrachman participated in the discussion.

Question: What is your position on the relation between state and religion?

Answer: We have to start with empirical analysis. Let's say that everyone here wants to have something we call democracy and at the same time also wants to have a very active religious life. And if there is secularism, it is often regarded as a prerequisite to building democracy. However, I should say that this (secularism) is most profoundly misconceptionalized, even among Western intellectuals.

Secularism is not only inaccurately conceived as a prediction of where a society will go, it is also a prescription that you have to be secular to become a democrat. Nevertheless, most democracies are not anti-religion.

I should stress that they don't ally themselves with religion, but give some support to religion. The simplistic version of modernization theory implies that there are at least four reinforcing dichotomies: traditional versus modern societies, high religious practicing societies versus low religious practicing societies, little separation of church and state versus strict separation of church and state, and non-democratic regimes versus democratic.

However, three of the most famous political scientists, Robert Dahl, Arend Lijphart and Juan L. Linz, never included any discussion of secularism in their definitions of modern democracies. None of them did.

So how would you redefine the concept of secularism?

I prefer to use the idea of "multiple secularisms" to get around some of the difficulties of the term. This would help me analyze the great variations in religion-state relations that exist in modern democracies

In French, the essence of revolution was a hostile position with one major religion. This is regarded as the essence of modern secularism, making the state free from religion where all Catholicoriented universities had been forced to close.

Where is Turkey? Turkey adopts the most extreme version of French secularism; they looked at what happened and wanted to have nationalism and regarded religious people as challengers to nationalism. And I don't think anybody here (in Indonesia) who wants to have an active religious life is attracted to this idea.

In the U.S., secularism is also a separation between church and religion. So everyone could construct religious freedom in their own state. And when they came together and started to think about the constitution, all they could come up is a compromise that the state should not make general law about religion.

In general, I find it more useful when discussing democracy and the world's religions to speak of what I have called the "twin tolerations", which are the minimum degree of toleration democracy needs from religion and the minimum degree of toleration that religion needs from the state for the polity to be democratic.

What is the minimum degree of toleration?

Religious institutions should not have constitutionally privileged prerogatives which allow them authoritatively to mandate public policy to democratically elected officials. The minimum degree of toleration religion needs from democracy is not only the complete right to worship, but the freedom of religious individuals and groups to publicly advance their values in civil society, and to sponsor organizations and movements in political society, as long as their public advancement of these beliefs does not impinge negatively on the liberties of other citizens, or violate democracy and the law, by violence or other means.

The financial support to religions on the part of the state in Senegal, India and Indonesia certainly violate French or U.S. ideas of a strict separation of religion and state, but does not violate citizens' human rights, or violate the necessary sphere of autonomy that I have identified as the "twin tolerations" that modern democracies need.

Certainly, the strong majority of religious leaders and followers alike in India and Senegal, and to a lesser extent Indonesia, have arrived at a mutual accommodation with, and even support of, a democratic polity and their own version of a "secular state".

Democracy is often regarded to be rooted in Judeo-Christian tradition, which can be a problem in the Muslim world. Is it true that if we want to build democracy we have to adopt a liberal democracy?

We have to talk about utilization and invention. People can have desire to create something ... when they want to adapt and revise something. Like in Japan, they have Japanese capitalism which is very Japanese. In India, they have a very totally Indian version of democracy. Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid (of Nahdlatul Ulama) says that this country needs democracy, (but) he does not say (you need) Western style democracy. He said that you have many religions and you need to live peacefully.

Hence, I believe that every single religion has something that is useful for and compatible with democratic values.

What do you think of Indonesia as a new democracy but with a Muslim-majority population?

I think Indonesia has invented a system of relations between state and religion where a Religious Ministry here gives support to all religions, such as in their schooling or when their mosques or churches get burned down. So, we can live in a variety of ways. And you have Pancasila, despite its flaws, such as ambivalence about using state force to protect against Islamist violations of human rights in some parts of Indonesia, and the fact that for most of the Soeharto period, the military defined and orchestrated Pancasila, it still has some political virtues for a society such as Indonesia's.

Pancasila persistently helped defend against demands for an Islamic state religion that would have exacerbated interreligious relations in its highly diverse and pluralistic society. Pancasila officially recognizes, and gives some support, to five religions in addition to Islam; Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and with the advent of democracy, Confucianism. In the "twin tolerations", I argued that all religions are "multivocal". What this means for Islam is that officially implemented systems of sharia would necessarily have a strong element of "state sharia" because one side of the multi-vocality would be state privilege and have the coercive powers of the state behind it.

What is the prospect of Indonesia becoming an Islamic state?

Due to the differences between "traditionalist" Muslims in NU, and "modernist" Muslims in Muhammadiyah—and their political and cultural sensitivity to the existence and rights of Hindus,

Buddhists, Christians and non-practicing Muslims—leaders of both these massive organizations are opposed to an Islamic state, which they know would lead to the non-consensual imposition of any single group's vision of "state sharia". Muhammadiyah's Amien Rais, for example, says that the Koran does not say anything about the formation of an Islamic state, or about Muslims' obligation to create an Islamic state, and that the Koran is not a book of law but a source of law. NU's Gus Dur is a regular participant in public arguments making the case why Indonesia, given its great social and religious diversity, which he sees as an empirical fact, should make the normative political choice for a pluralist polity.

Perhaps, like in Turkey or Pakistan, obstacles to democracy are not really posed by Islam but by military and intelligence organizations unaccountable to democratic authority. •

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Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd: A Critical Theologist Fighting for Justice

iberal Egyptian Koranic scholar Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd had no idea his presence here in Indonesia for a seminar would offend hard-line Muslim groups.

Under pressure from the groups, a high-ranking official at the Religious Affairs Ministry sent a text message to the committee that read: "... We suggest Abu Zayd cancel his trip ... in spite of last minute advice, this reminder is crucial and final. We are not responsible for his attendance..."

Zayd then canceled his appearance at the meeting. Hence, one should not underestimate the antidemocratic elements spreading throughout Indonesia, which seem ready to kill its newly found freedoms.



Born in Qufaha near Tanta, Egypt on July 10, 1943, Zayd earned his bachelor degree in Arabic studies from Cairo University in 1972, and later his master's (1977) and doctorate (1981) in Islamic Studies from the same university. His dissertation is on the interpretation of the Koran.

In 1982, he joined the faculty of the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at Cairo University as an assistant professor. He became an associate professor in 1987.

Nevertheless, Zayd suffered persecution for his view of the Koran as a religious, mythical, literary work. After his promotion to the rank of full professor in 1995 and a hisbah (Committee for Virtue and the Propagation of Islam) trial against him by a fundamentalist Islamic scholar, Zayd was declared a murtad (apostate) by an Egyptian court.

He was consequently declared divorced from his wife, Cairo University French Literature professor Ibthal Younis.

"The verdict is there but the Egyptian government never implemented the verdict against me," Zayd said during a recent interview, just a few hours before he left the country.

He added that he and his wife had challenged the verdict before deciding to leave the country and live in the Netherlands.

He currently holds the Ibn Rushd Chair of Humanism and Islam at the University for Humanistics, Utrecht, the Netherlands.

"I have never been expelled by the Egyptian government," he said, adding that he freely visits his country since he still holds Egyptian citizenship and carries his country's passport.

"And my wife returned several times to Egypt for the supervision of master's and PhD students at the French department of the Cairo University."

Zayd was dismayed and confounded by the unprecedented treatment he endured here.

"As many as 10 of my books have been translated into Bahasa Indonesia and I supervised many Indonesian students who were sent by the Religious Affairs Ministry and some have become professors."

He said the motives of the Muslim fundamentalists who had moved against him in Egypt had been mixed.

"I was highly critical toward the development of the so-called Islamic investment system at that time," he recalled.

Zayd said many ulema have become "religious advisors" in a system where a "highly suspicious" 25 percent interest rate was floated.

"I uncovered the lies and tricks ... they stole a huge amount of money from people who have never received anything, even until now," he said, "so they moved against me by hook or by crook and by making a lot of noise about my academic works."

He argued that the science of interpretation was deeply rooted in Islamic tradition and was not something utterly borrowed from the West.

"Shall we wait for God to interpret the Koran for us?" said Zayd, who received the Ibn Rushd Prize for Freedom of Thought in Berlin in 2005.

"Humans can interpret the Koran only with their human capacity, which can be empowered by knowledge. If we are ignorant God will be very angry ..."

Despite the accusation he is a "Westernized" theologist, Zayd can be very critical of the West.

He said the war against terror and the subsequent expressions, such as "our values" and "our culture", entailed the notion that others were "uncivilized".

"And I don't believe the U.S. is working to spread its democratic values because interests dictate its policy," he said of what he dubs the "new empire project of the U.S."

He cited the example of how the U.S. had supported Pakistan's Musharraf who had illegally annulled the constitution and arrested activists, while at the same time slapping a total economic embargo on military-ruled Myanmar.

He said that before the failure of the U.S. in Iraq, the U.S. had tried to "democratize" the dictatorial regimes in the region, but now the U.S. was forced to cooperate with the "moderates" in the region.

"No nation can install democracy without the working of internal power, like here in Indonesia with its student movement," Zayd pointed out.

"Besides, democracy can result in a new government that the U.S. might not like," said Zayd, who supervised master's and PhD students at the University of Leiden as well.

"But when speak about the culture of the West; we speak about ideas and philosophies ... about possible shared values ... about a free market of an exchange of ideas.

"Here the distinction between the East and West is sometimes ideologically emphasized," he said.

"Hence, the differentiation of the different aspects of the West is important, we don't need to take the West as it is and reject the West as it is. Besides there is no single 'West', when the European Union sides with dictators, for example, I would be against it at this specific point, because I am with freedom and justice."

"So I have to be critically engaged with every culture, even with my own culture," he said.

Zayd believes no culture will contradict the values of human justice, political and religious freedoms. He says the denunciation of these values in any cultural context is an instrument of protecting particular political powers in order for certain groups to maintain privileges at the political cost of others.

He said universal values, which are often regarded as purely Western, are in fact part of the human struggle for peace and justice.

And he holds the view that a humanistic interpretation of the Koran can account for social change within Muslim societies, whose development has been stalled by the dogmatic interpretation of certain ulema "who want to keep their power as the only authority of Islamic knowledge by manipulating both the people and the political regime." •

First published by The Jakarta Post, November 30, 2007

M. Quraish Shihab: Promoting Wisdom, Science and Moderation



Iormer religious affairs ■ minister and Islamic scholar Muhammad Ouraish Shihab's decision to repeat a year of high school proved to be a defining moment in his life.

Quraish graduated from Tsanawiyah senior high school in Cairo without the necessary grades to get into the School of Ushuluddin (Religious

Principles) at Al-Azhar University. But, after days and nights of soul-searching, he decided to return and improve his score. Eventually he was accepted by the prestigious university.

The soft-spoken Quraish earned his bachelor degree, majoring in tafsir (religious interpretation) and hadith (sayings or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), in 1967.

He took his master's degree at the same university, writing his thesis on Al-I'jaz Al-Tasyri'i li Al-Qur'an Al-Karim (the Distinctiveness of the Koran's Regulations) and graduating in 1969.

After serving as deputy rector at the Islamic State Academy (IAIN) Alaudin, South Sulawesi, Quraish undertook doctorate level Koranic studies at the same university in Cairo, graduating summa cum laude in 1982.

"If someone asks me what I would do if I had the chance to roll back time, I would not change a thing," he said during an interview

at his home. "I have no regrets."

However, when asked about the tensions between religious minority groups such as Ahmadiyah, al-Qiyadah and Lia Eden, and mainstream Muslims, he bemoaned the fact that people were impelled to take the law into their own hands.

"Any violent action is regrettable and cannot be tolerated," he said when presented with the facts that some Ahmadiyah and al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah followers were attacked and some of their houses were burned down or ransacked.

Recently an angry mob rummaged through the building where self-proclaimed prophet Ahmad Moshaddeq, leader of the al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah group—who are considered apostates by purist Muslims—baptized his followers in Bogor, West Java.

Some of the people in the mob were wearing white haj caps, attire linked with piety.

Lia Aminuddin was likewise harassed for preaching revelations which she said were delivered to her by the angel Gabriel.

Quraish said anybody who committed violence should be brought to justice.

He stressed it was vital to carefully study emerging religious groups before passing judgment, adding that even fatwa from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) could not be considered legally binding.

Quraish was formerly the head of the MUI.

He recommended Pakem, a regency-level religious freedom watchdog, be empowered. Pakem consists of representatives from the Religious Affairs Ministry, police and intelligence agencies, as well as academics and community and religious figures.

After a thorough study, Pakem would determine the most appropriate path to be pursued. And if a legal path were to be chosen, the court would have the final say, Quraish said.

"Because hastily criminalizing these groups won't always solve the problem," he said, citing the case of Lia, the leader of the Lia Eden group, who was recently released from prison after serving 16 months of her 24-month sentence, but stubbornly vowed to continue preaching.

"We have to be careful because there is always an element of truth within the teachings of such groups," said Quraish who was religious affairs minister in Soeharto's Development Cabinet VII (1998).

He said that even Ahamdiyah was divided into two groups. One recognized Muhammad as the last prophet, the other, Gulam Ahmad.

"And there is always a background and context, most probably the leaders of such groups are sick," he said, citing Ahmad Moshaddeg, the leader of the al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah sect, who finally confessed he had falsely proclaimed himself to be the next prophet after Muhammad.

Asked if al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah should declare itself a new religion aside from Islam and drop its Islamic identity, he said that might be a wise idea.

Quraish said the public generally had a very limited understanding of religion. "This is because the flow of (unchecked) information penetrates into houses through technology," said Quraish, who is married to Fatmawati and has five children.

"It is important for religious leaders and scholars to keep spreading their knowledge of religion to people.

"This includes spreading the word that congratulating Christians on Christmas is acceptable in Islam as long as it does not disturb Muslims' aqidah," he said, adding that Muslims were even allowed to perform their own prayers in church.

Quraish also holds moderate ideas on how Muslim women should dress.

His daughter, TV presenter Najwa Shihab, who is the wife of Hukumonline founder Ibrahim Assegaf, does not wear a headscarf.

"There is an ongoing debate about whether it is compulsory for a woman to cover her body. I am of the opinion that is good for a woman to cover her head, but those women who choose not to wear the headscarf have not violated anything," he said.

He also believes tensions in conflict-torn areas like Poso and Maluku have now seceded, "thanks to the government's Malino peace agreement."

"But I disagree with you, it is not really religious tension because economic, social and political factors have also played a very significant part in fueling the tension," Quraish said. •

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Bambang Basuki: Urging Society to Rethink Disability



iscrimination is cruel," recalled Mitra Netra Foundation chairman Bambang Basuki.

Bambang experienced gradual decline in his vision from his last year of senior high school onward due to glaucoma and the degeneration of the cataract.

He said society treated blind

people very differently. He went from being viewed as a promising student to a burden on society.

Bambang had been very good at science and art. He wanted to be an architect.

But his gradual, hurtful blindness appeared to have crushed his hope. He underwent eight operations on his eyes until the nightmare became a reality: complete blindness.

"After completing high school, I confined myself to my house for five years, nervously preparing myself for the worst," Bambang said during a recent interview at his home.

He later met with a blind teacher of special education who had gone through SPG (teacher education high school). Bambang went to see the principal of SPG, hoping to follow the same path.

"But the principal told me that, on the advice of the school's teachers, they were not taking any more blind students. I was shocked," said Bambang, who was born in Medan on April 20, 1950.

Bambang later applied to go to IKIP Jakarta (Jakarta's Teacher

College) but was again rejected because he was blind.

It was the prominent educationalist Arief Rachman who stepped in on Bambang's behalf, persuading the IKIP rector to accept him as a student.

Bambang graduated from the IKIP with a high distinction in 1980.

He later wanted to be an English teacher at a state-sanctioned special education school, but was unsure whether he would be allowed to take the selection test for civil servants.

Receiving no response from the selection committee, Bambang finally took the case to a high-ranking official at the Education Ministry, who happily arranged for him to take the test on the very last day.

Bambang, who is now an English teacher at a special school in Cilandak, has since been fighting to advance the rights of the disabled. He became the secretary-general of the Indonesian Association for the Blind (Pertuni).

However, he was not comfortable with the fact that people with disabilities were excluded from policy-making.

"We were treated as people who needed assistance, not as people who could make contributions to society," he said.

So he and his associates established the Mitra Netra Foundation in 1991, which aims to assist the blind through education programs.

The foundation has been producing audio books for the blind since 1992. With the assistance of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), it distributes 100 cassettes per month to 15 special schools. And almost every year, the visually impaired individuals who visit the center listen to nearly 12,000 audio cassettes.

"But now we also produce digital talking books, which are cheap and efficient as users can navigate into sub-chapters and pages at ease," said Bambang, who is married to Husna and has three children.

The foundation offers a range of services, from orientation

and mobility training for the blind to counseling. It also provides visually impaired students with companions to help with writing assignments and test taking.

Students are offered after-school tutoring and computer classes where they learn basic skills like typing. Every year the foundation trains approximately 60 people in computer skills.

Bambang said he had tried to increase society's awareness through regular campaigns in the form of special programs, exhibitions and seminars.

Last year, for example, 100 of 300 visually impaired individuals demonstrated their computer skills including the sophisticated operation of Microsoft Word and Excel for typing and accounting purposes. Bambang said the foundation had launched a program called Thousands of Books for the Blind.

The program brings together 300 volunteers to retype the books to convert them into digital Braille using another foundation's product called the Mitra Netra Braille Converter (MBC). And as many as 13 publishers have agreed to give the foundation the electronic version of the books they conventionally print and sell in the market.

"Each year, we produce 125 titles of Braille-based books and the same number for digital talking books," Bambang said.

Organized by the E-Braille Indonesian Community (KEBI), the data base can also be accessed on line by the blind, who must use special screen reader software called JAWS (Job Access with Speech).

"Unfortunately we are still unable to produce our own screen reader software," Bambang said, adding that he would invite ICT experts and donors to help develop the Indonesian version of screen reader software.

"Alternatively, we should buy the JAWS, which is expensive—Rp 12 million per package, to be installed in any internet caf, with a blind population," said Bambang, who has presented papers here and abroad on issues related to people with disabilities.

He said disabled people could only realize their full potential if they lived in an inclusive, barrier-free society.

"But society will never be inclusive of disabled people if they are not accepted at regular schools," said Bambang, who arranged a demonstration of the computer skills of some of his colleagues during the celebration of the International Day for People with Disabilities at the Presidential Palace on Dec. 6.

He said he was appreciative of the fact the Education Ministry had made it mandatory for schools to accept children with disabilities. However, he said many regular schools lacked the resources to hire special education teachers.

He said the Cilandak public school for students with disabilities and his foundation, as a resource center, were ready to help regular schools through the provision of special education teachers and learning materials.

Bambang is glad attitudes toward people with disabilities have become more accepting, however he feels the word "disabled" is used as a label or a stereotype.

"I prefer to call people like us 'people with special challenges'," he said.

For more information about the Mitra Netra Foundation go to www. mitranetra.or.id. •

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Early Detection Key to Successful Treatment



ne day when Nuraini was taking a shower, she felt a hard lump on her left breast. It was like a tiny, moving ball trying to break out from below the skin.

She went to visit a doctor at a nearby Puskesmas (community health center) and was told the lump was nothing to worry about. Luckily her husband insisted she get a second opinion at a hospital.

"It turned out it was a benign

tumor at stage one," Nuraini said.

Breast cancer usually develops in stages, from stage one to stage four.

A month after the tumor was diagnosed, Nuraini underwent an operation, which was followed by radiation and chemotherapy. Now she is in remission from the illness that could have killed her.

However, Nuraini was lucky. Many women suffering from the symptoms of breast cancer delay paying a visit to the doctor.

"About 70 percent of people diagnosed with breast cancer are already at stage three or four, which is usually considered too late for medical treatment to be effective," oncologist and surgeon Sonar S. Panigoro from Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital said.

Breast cancer occurs when cancer cells attack glandular breast tissue. Most cases of this type of cancer are found on the upper part of the breast closest to the arm.

Breast cancer can spread by way of the lymphatic system or blood stream to the lungs, liver, bones or other organs, or can spread directly to the skin.

It can also occur in men, although cases are very rare. In Indonesia, only one man diagnosed with breast cancer died in 2006.

Breast cancer is the world's fifth most common cause of cancerrelated death, after lung cancer, stomach cancer, liver cancer and colon cancer. Breast cancer resulted in 502,000 deaths (7 percent of cancer-related deaths and almost 1 percent of all deaths) worldwide in 2005.

"Here it is estimated that between 18 to 20 percent of women may be diagnosed with breast cancer. It ranks second after cervical cancer," said Sonar.

Sonar said when breast cancer is at stage one or two, operations can be performed, followed by a combination of radiation therapy, chemotherapy and hormone therapy.

"However, if breast cancer is at stage three or four, the adjuvant therapies are pursued first before an operation is attempted. But in many cases, it is too late for an operation," he said.

Depending on each patent's age and the type of cancer they have, cancer cases are divided into various categories from high risk to low risk. Each category of cancer is treated differently. Treatment possibilities include radiation therapy, chemotherapy, hormone therapy and immune therapy.

Early detection is the best way to deal with breast cancer. However, in many cases slow-growing breast tumors may not be detectable by touch for up to eight years.

Women can examine their own breasts regularly by pressing each breast firmly and carefully using three fingers. It is best to do this one week after menstruation.

However, it is more reliable to seek a mammogram (x-ray), USG (ultrasonography) or advanced MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) to check for breast cancer.

With technology improving rapidly, breast cancer cases are increasingly being detected early before any symptoms are present.

"The mammography is recommended for women over 40, while the other early detection methods are best for women under 40," said Sonar.

While the cause of breast cancer remains to a large extent unknown, many risk factors have been recognized. These include gender, age, hormones, a high-fat diet, alcohol intake, obesity and environmental factors such as tobacco consumption and radiation.

Psychological aspects should also be taken seriously as not all breast cancer patients cope with their illness in the same way.

Many larger hospitals are affiliated with cancer support groups, which help patients cope with the issues they may face in a supportive environment.

In Indonesia, the Reach to Recovery support group was formed in 1997 by the Indonesian Cancer Foundation (YKI).

The support group is made up of breast cancer survivors who voluntarily provide counseling to people diagnosed with breast cancer.

"The volunteers ensure patients that medical treatment is the best way to treat their illness. In many cases, patients listen to the volunteers more than their doctors," said program director Rabecca N. Angka, who also works at the YKI's Early Diagnostic Center in Lebak Bulus, South Jakarta.



However, she said temptation among breast cancer patients to try alternative treatments remains high.

Sonar said many breast cancer patients try alternative treatments before seeking medical advice because of what they see on television.

"They say traditional

healers can transfer the disease to an animal. Sometimes patients even come to believe that breast cancer is the result of black magic," he said. •

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Breast Cancer Survivors Lend Ears, Hearts to Counsel Others



was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1986 she felt as if she had been sentenced to death. "I was two month's pregnant," she told The Jakarta Post. "My doctor gave my family a difficult choice: save the mother or save the baby. But my husband insisted that he wanted to save both."

Supraptini and her husband decided to have her wait until she

delivered her daughter before receiving an operation to remove the tumors. The treatment included 25 courses of radiation treatment and six cycles of chemotherapy.

Although Supraptini's breast cancer was already at an advanced stage (stage three), her immense courage and positive attitude allowed her to overcome the disease. The years which have passed since her cancer went into remission have been blessed. With tremendous support from her family, Supraptini has been able to watch her daughter blossom to maturity.

"Although I could not breast-feed my daughter, her IQ reached 146," explains Supraptini. "She recently graduated cum laude from the School of Medicine at the University of Indonesia."

Since 2000, Supraptini has shared her experience with others diagnosed with breast cancer by becoming a breast cancer survivor

volunteer in YKI's (Indonesian Cancer Foundation) Reach to Recovery program.

Reach to Recovery was formed in 1997 by the YKI under the service and rehabilitation division of the foundation. The program coordinates volunteers who have survived breast cancer to provide counseling to recently diagnosed breast cancer patients.

"I have talked to at least 100 breast cancer patients, through visit or phone, counseling them during their hard time," said Supraptini. "I feel relief and accomplishment when I can help patients to regain their self confidence so that they may focus and make a well informed decision for proper medical treatment.

"But there are, however, cases that have made me sad," she said, citing an example of a patient who insisted on alternative treatment when her breast cancer was at stage one, but failed desolately after the tumor became uncontrollable.

Speaking of the obstacles which hamper breast cancer, Supraptini specifically addresses the high costs of the medicines which are usually needed to treat breast cancer.

These expensive medicines are not all covered by state-run insurance scheme ASKES or ASKESKIN, and have therefore forced many to pursue an alternative treatment. AKSES is a government-sanctioned health insurance mainly for civil servants, while ASKESKIN is for the poor.

"The tax is incredibly high since the medicine is still imported and classified as luxury goods," explains Supraptini. She added that it is time for the government to change its policies with regard to import duties imposed on life-saving medications.

Another survivor to participate in the YKI Reach to Recovery program is Agustia Ludbariana, who was only diagnosed with breast cancer once it had already advanced to stage three. Augustia explains that a close friend had urged her to consistently undergo medical treatment.

In 1996, Agustia received a successful operation which was accompanied by radiation and chemotherapy. Recognizing the

strong influence that her friend had in giving advice to seek treatment, Augustia decided to become a volunteer counselor for the Reach to Recovery program.

The experience of helping others in their time of crises has been filled with emotional highs and lows. Augustia recalls counseling one breast cancer patient who happened to be a doctor.

"She seemed angry and decided to opt for 'spiritual' healing instead. Maybe because she knows 'too much'," said Agustia.

Despite helping cancer patients to cope with the psychological stress of the illness, patients who pursue spiritual or holistic avenues for treatment alone have a diminished opportunity to fully recover from the disease.

Besides Reach to Recovery, Augustina is also a member of Cancer Information and Support Center (CISC), another support group that facilitates her visits to Dharmais and Cipto Mangunkusumo hospitals to provide patients there with direct counseling.

Another survivor, Martini Lim recalls that when she was diagnosed with stage two breast cancer, she



quit all her social activities." I confined myself to my room," said Martini.

Upon advice from colleagues and support from her husband, Martini decided to call the YKI and learn more about Reach to Recovery from its program coordinator Dr. Rebecca N. Angka who urged her to talk to survivors.

Martini's successful 2003 operation was followed by six cycles of chemotherapy. She has subsequently become a volunteer for the Reach to Recovery program. She regularly helps to conduct meetings and workshops among the survivors who are willing to help lift the burden of others.



Celebrities who are also breast cancer survivors such as Rima Melati are often invited to attend the workshops. Additionally Reach to Recovery also involves oncologists, psychologists and other specialists including communication experts.

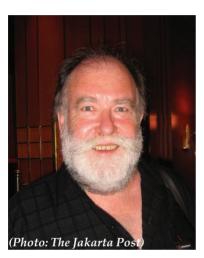
Dr. Rebecca said that of the 100 survivors who received counseling from the program, about 50 became volunteers for Reach to Recovery.

Many of the planned events are restricted however due to the program's inadequate budget. Reach to Recovery relies mainly on the financial contributions from the survivors and a few pharmaceutical companies.

"One of the challenges of the program is to find permanent donors who can give full support to ensure the continuity and expansion of the program," said Dr. Rebecca. "While YKI branches in Surabaya and Bandung have run Reach to Recovery programs, much work is still required to expand the service to remote areas."

Early Diagnostic Center's Indonesian Cancer Foundation (YKI) Jl. Lebak Bulus Tengah No. 9, Cilandak, South Jakarta Tel. 021-7690704, email: pddyki@uninet.net.id. •

Australian Journalists Given New Insights into Indonesia



Australian Consortium of In-Country Indonesia Studies (ACICIS), in partnership with Atma Jaya University, a group of Australian university students are on a six-week Journalism Professional Practicum in Jakarta. The program is designed to provide them with a greater insight into the realities of contemporary Indonesia. ACICIS

deputy director David Reeve, a long-time Indonesian observer from the University of New South Wales, outlined the program for Alpha Amirrachman, who recently interviewed Reeve by email for *The Jakarta Post*.

Question: What aspects are the young Australian journalists learning in this program and how will it help them enhance their understanding of Indonesia?

Answer: Australian students will get a high-profile internship at a placement rarely offered to Australian journalism students. They will learn about Indonesian language, culture and society, and the life of a journalism professional in an overseas setting. We are very keen to encourage Australian journalism students to see Indonesia in a more positive way.

We are doing this program for the benefit of the students. But of course we hope that in the future it will be of benefit to both countries to have maybe hundreds of Australians in the media who have had a strong and positive experience in Indonesia.

How do you see the role of media in shaping relations between Indonesia and Australia?

I think that for people who have personal knowledge and experiences of Indonesia, the press does not have much role in shaping their beliefs. For those people, the press provides information but not attitude. That's why we are working through our programs to expose more and more students to Indonesia.

For the general public, the media can shape attitudes, and these have the potential to sway governments, particularly in difficult times. I'm thinking of the emotions in Australia around the Schappelle Corby case, when some Australian media played a shameful role. But then, other media reported well. It's a mix. Overall, I think that good relations are stronger than bad press.

What do you think Australian journalists are lacking when reporting on Indonesia?

I think both governments were dishonest in making the press a scapegoat for other things that were wrong. Australia has a great tradition of sending good correspondents to Indonesia. Several of them have written excellent books on Indonesia, helping Australians to understand Indonesia. That foreign correspondent tradition has been going on for some 50 years. They have been a high quality lot overall. But some reporters and editors back in Australia have been much less good.

You are right to see a "politics of fear" at work here; irresponsible stereotyping—which is itself a tradition in Australian media for at least 150 years. What worries me now is the decreasing role for foreign correspondents in the Australian media. If that continues it will be a serious loss.

What do you think Indonesian journalists are lacking when reporting on Australia?

I enjoy reading all Indonesian reporting on Australia. I find it fascinating, and I don't mind whether it is positive or negative, well-sourced or badly informed. I find it all very interesting for what it tells me about Indonesian attitude. But as a scholar, I must say that some Indonesian reporting seems much better then others. The weaker journalists lack good contacts, lack personal experience and interpret events through prejudice and malice. That can actually make it more interesting to read, though less informative to the public. But that's the same all over the world. The good Indonesian journalism on Australia is of a high standard.

What are the various constraints Australian correspondents have come across in the process of foreign news reporting in Indonesia?

During the Soeharto era, Australian journalists had to be careful about reporting on Indonesia because there was always the threat that their visas would be canceled if they concentrated on "negative" news like human rights abuses, anti-government protests and independence movements in East Timor, Aceh and West Papua. In 1986 all Australian journalists were banned from Indonesia, and it took some time for all media organizations to be readmitted. Nowadays, Indonesia's free press means foreign journalists are not restricted, except in access to Papua and, perhaps, Aceh. However, there are still some underlying tensions because of perceived negative reporting in Australia on separatist issues, as well as the high profile given by the Australian media to terrorism in Indonesia and drug cases.

Both countries appear to enjoy a certain degree of press freedom. Does this freedom necessarily foster close neighborly ties?

Press freedoms are not meant to foster neighborly ties. That is not what they are for. They are for the health of the societies in which they operate. Neighborly ties are built in other ways. If they are good and strong ties, they have nothing to fear from press freedom. I think that all of us have experienced press freedoms and press restrictions. Even at its worst (rumors, defamation), a free press is better.

Do you think the killing of five Australian journalists in East Timor in 1975 still haunts Australian journalists and still has the potential to disturb Indonesia-Australia relations?

Yes, this issue still haunts some Australian journalists and also particularly the families of the journalists killed. Not surprisingly. Both governments would like to believe that the problem is behind them. I think that is true. The issue has remained alive for 32 years, and still has potential to disturb in the future. Both governments will try to play it down. But this is an issue with complex legal and moral aspects. It is hard to see what the best option would be. I also think of the large number of journalists killed around the world in 2007. It is always a bad idea to attack journalists. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, January 30, 2008

Zuhairi Misrawi: Promoting Religious Tolerance, Pluralism

t was during his university days at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, that young Muslim intellectual Zuhari Misrawi learned both the practical and philosophical essence of religious tolerance.

When he and his colleagues visited Egypt's Catholic Archbishop Youhanna Qaltah to interview him for the students' journal, Qaltah immediately halted the conversation when the azan (call to prayer) was heard.

"If you want to perform your wudhu (ablution before prayers), the place is located on the right side of the church. Please feel free to say your prayers ... this is the praying map with the kiblah direction," said Qaltah, gently indicating the map to his guests.

Zuhairi cannot hide his admiration.



"His understanding and respect are an acknowledgement of Muslims' very existence," Zuhari told The Jakarta Post during a recent interview on the sidelines of a discussion of his new book Al Our'an Kitab Toleransi: Inklusivisme, Pluralisme dan Multikukturalisme (Koran, the Tolerant Holy Book: Inclusivism, Pluralism and Multiculturalism).

"This is in contrast to what I have always been taught that non-Muslims are unappreciative towards Muslims and are even willing to destroy Islam," he added.

Born Feb. 5, 1977, in Sumenep, Madura, Zuhairi studied at the Islamic boarding schools al-Amien and Jami'iyyah Tahfidzil Qur'an.

He was raised in the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) tradition; the country's biggest Muslim organization that claims to have 35 million members.

After studying at Islamic boarding schools for almost six years, Zuhairi continued his education at the Ushuluddin Faculty of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt (1995-2000).

He became an editor for Terobosan bulletin and Oase journal at the university, allowing him to interview several foremost intellectuals, including Yusuf al-Qaradhawi, Sayyed Yasin, Halah Musthafa, Youhanna Qaltah, 'Athif 'Iraqi, Muhammad 'Abdul Mu'thi Bayoumi, Adonis and Nawal Saadawi.

After completing his studies in 2000, he returned home to Indonesia and immediately joined the Department of Research and Human Resource Development of NU as coordinator for the study and research division from 2000-2002.

He delved further in activism with NU.

Zuhairi helped publish Tashwirul Afkar journal as its editor and was also active with the Indonesian Society for Pesantren and Community Development as a coordinator for the Islamic Emancipation Program.

Despite of his tight schedule as an activist, Zuhairi still manages to write prolifically. His writing mainly covers contemporary Islam, politics, religious tolerance and inter-faith dialogue.

Aside from writing for the national media, Zuhairi has also produced books, including Dari Syariat menuju Magashid Syariat (From Sharia to Magashid Sharia, 2003); Doktrin Islam Progresif (Doctrine of Islamic Progressive, 2004); Islam Melawan Terorisme (Islam against Terrorism, 2004); and Menggugat Tradisi: Pergulatan Pemikiran Anak Muda NU (Challenging Tradition: Struggle of Thoughts among NU Youth Members, 2004).

He also contributed chapters to several books, including Syariat Yes, Syariat No (Sharia Yes, Sharia No, 2003); Menjadi Indonesia; 13 Abad Eksistensi Islam di Bumi Nusantara (Becoming Indonesia; Thirteen Centuries of the Existence of Islam in the Archipelago, 2006); and Islam Mazhab Tengah: Persembahan 70 Tahun Tarmizi Taher (The Middle Mazhab of Islam: Dedicated for Tarmizi Taher on his 70th Birthday, (2007).

An adherent supporter of moderate-progressive Islam, Zuhairi showed his anxiety when asked about the increased Islamic radicalism in the country.

Zuhairi said many seemed unaware the power of love in Islam derives from bi-sm 'allaah ar-rah maan ar-rah em, which means "in the name of Allah Most Gracious Most Merciful".

He further cited his experience when he visited a mosque in Boston, U.S., where the Koranic verse al-Anbiya:107 is vividly displayed on its front wall: "And (thus, O Prophet,) We have sent thee as (an evidence of Our) grace towards all the worlds".

"This means God sent Prophet Muhammad as a blessing for all the worlds," said Zuhairi, who recently returned from a conference on democracy and pluralism in Brussels where he was a speaker.

He criticized the religious violence that has marked the country, which he said was an obvious diversion of the Prophet's teachings.

"Fortunately, what has saved our country from plunging into a situation like conflict-torn Pakistan is the role of NU and Muhammadiyah," Zuhairi said.

Muhammadiyah is the second biggest Muslim organization in the country, which claims to have 25 million members.

The two prominent Islam-oriented organizations are considered societal pillars in the country. They are not politically oriented; nonetheless, their leverage in Indonesia's political scene is undisputable, Zuhairi said.

The leaders of the two organizations have called on the government to take strong measures against Islamic hard-liners that campaign for the "elimination" of minority groups.

Young Islamic activists from the two organizations, including Zuhairi, unremittingly collaborate to promote a new Indonesia, which respects pluralism and democracy. He said pluralism, or alta'addudiyyah, is an inevitable fact due Indonesia's vast diversity.

He added sharia was a cultural product because it had been historically constructed.

"Sharia is attached to a specific territorial, geographical and socio-political culture. Hence, an idea has emerged to deconstruct the historicity of sharia to search for an inclusive dimension of Islam," said Zuhairi, who is married to Nurul Jazimah and has one daughter.

Zuhairi and his fellow activists from the two organizations work hand in hand to fight against corruption, which many say was further decentralized after the country embraced the era of regional autonomy.

When asked about the demand of some sections to establish an Islamic caliphate system of government, Zuhairi answered: "Historical evidence shows that the caliphate system was bankrupt since it was unable to overcome the problems of power sharing and distribution. They (the political elites) proved unable to detach themselves from authoritarianism.

"There is no obligation to implement a caliphate system, because all Muslims are automatically created by God to become caliphs. It means that every human being has to be responsible for all his deeds to God in the hereafter ... in the Koran, caliph is more a personal than collective calling," he said.

Zuhairi has participated in the activities of several other organizations, including Lingkar Muda Indonesia (Youth

Indonesia Circle), Moderate Muslim Society and Lembaga Studi Islam Progresif (Islamic Progressive Study Institute).

And he shows no signs of slowing down.

In an apparent move to prepare himself to enter the world of politics, he became head of the Inter-Religious Division of the Executive Board of Baitul Muslimin of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle at the end of 2007. Last month he was officially inaugurated as a member of the political party.

Yet his activism goes beyond his country by showing his apprehension of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

"A holistic, not partial approach needs to be pursued," he said, adding the conflict could not be regarded as simply Israel versus Palestine or Israel versus Lebanon.

He added internal problems needed to be tackled first and that all Arab countries in the Middle East should put aside their respective interests and unite to boost their bargaining power with the U.S. and Israel in resolving the ongoing conflict.

In 2006, Zuhairi visited Israel on the invitation of the Israeli government under Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, to provide a second opinion on Israel's policy towards Palestine.

"I said (to the Israeli government) that Israel should use 'soft' politics, not 'hard' politics with Palestinians because they (the latter) are already weak," he recalled his meeting with the Israeli officials.

He said he supported the establishment of relations between Indonesia and Israel.

He hinted that since Israel is the only superpower in the Middle East, establishing relations with the country could pave the way for Indonesia as the biggest Muslim country to capitalize on its leverage over the ongoing conflict, which has cost millions of innocent lives. •

Wilders' Movie All About Dutch Politics

he debate on whether or not right-wing Dutch MP Geert Wilders should release the anti-Koran movie has taken a new twist recently, as a prominent Dutch Jewish figure, Harry de Winter, says Wilders' statements are on the same level as anti-Semitism.

Wilders had earlier suggested Muslims should "tear out half of the Koran if they wished to stay in the Netherlands" because it contained "terrible things".

But de Winter said, "If you read the Old Testament (the Jewish Thora) then you also find texts about hatred of homosexuals, hatred of women and the murdering of non-Jewish preachers."



Moroccan Muslims strongly felt there were double standards in Wilders' stand, Fouad Sidali of the Cooperative Organization of Moroccans in the Netherlands told Radio Netherlands Worldwide. Sidali also said he was relieved to hear de Winter's statement.

As many as 6,800 Dutch people have signed a petition to show the world that Wilders and his forthcoming film Fitna do not express the views of everyone in Holland (http://www.wildersisnotholland.com).

The debate, which has enormously polarized Dutch society, provides us with some appealing lessons.

First, this is an issue of Dutch multiculturalism and is really a Dutch thing where local social, economic and political crises and subsequent intrigues were pulled beyond the boundary, becoming an unnecessary but inevitably international issue.

There is a popular perception that the large incursion of Muslim migrants, mostly from Morocco, have caused serious social and economic problems for the broader Dutch community.

The migrants are perceived to be unable to assimilate into Dutch society.

Some sections within indigenous Dutch society fear the presence of these one million

Muslims may endanger the very core of their liberal democratic tradition, particularly amid the rise of Islamic terrorism.

Second, this relates to the issue of freedom of expression. In Dutch history the freedom of expression extends back to the Dutch 'Golden Age' where after the Union of Utrecht in 1579, the freedom of conscience (a principle that no one can be persecuted for his reasons of religion) was officially assured by the United Provinces of Netherlands.

Some within Dutch society seem to have become so obsessed with the freedom of expression, and the always blurred limit of this freedom has been delicately tested. The recent brouhaha over the Wilders' movie-to-be proves this fragility.

In a multicultural society where norms vary, the limits of

freedom become very subtle because the freedom is relatively limited by the freedom of others; shared wisdom, through an unremitting and civilized dialog are thus needed for the sake of the freedom itself.

Such dialog is required where one narrow-minded Dutch politician tries to internationalize a local crisis (which seems to be cracking the Dutch multicultural society) and plays the card that the Netherlands' long-cherished freedom is under threat from "uncivilized" Muslim immigrants.

For the Dutch multicultural society, the crisis seems to have spiraled out of control, with migrants suffering the entire blame. Some even say it has (even) gone beyond the issue of multiculturalism and has become an issue of "political correctness".

Wilders is just a politician of the day who wants others to fall into his short-lived political game.

So, if there is any violent verbal reaction from Indonesian Muslims as to whether the movie should be released, this would only strengthen Wilders' belief that Muslims are unable to articulate their cause in a cultured manner.

Freedom of expression (which Indonesia also values highly) would just be wasted if it is filled with mere empty condemnations and self-denial slogans or statement. It should be used in the way the Jewish Dutch leader de Winter did.

The fact that de Winter jumped into the crowd, criticizing Wilders by revealing the perceived weaknesses of his own holy book, shows that in a democracy even Jews can show solidarity in defense of Dutch Muslims.

It is, therefore, an opportunity and moral obligation for Indonesian Muslims to articulate to the world that the perceived intolerant elements of the Koran should be understood using a historical and contextual prism.

In a nutshell, the contextual interpretation of the Koran should be well expressed to the world and, equally importantly, the peaceful paradigm must be realized in Muslim deeds in tandem with inter-cultural and inter-religious dialog.

Only then will Muslims secure a place in this increasingly crowded world, without having to fall into the wild game of a local opportunistic politician in one particular country. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, Thursday, March 27, 2008

Gerry Van Klinken: From Physics to Politics: All For Indonesia

aking a switch from geology to Asian studies may not be the conventional path for an academic to take, but a fascination with Indonesian politics was enough for Gerry van Klinken.

Now a research fellow with the 157-year-old KITLV (Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies) in Leiden, van Klinken describes the move as "a big shift".

Over ten years of teaching physics at universities in Malaysia and Indonesia, his passion for Asian culture and politics, and particularly Indonesia where he spent his early childhood, grew.

So he decided to pursue a PhD in Indonesian history at Griffith



University in Australia, which he completed in 1996. Since then he has taught and conducted research at universities in Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Yogyakarta and now Leiden.

From 1998 he became a frequent media commentator on Indonesian current affairs.

Born in the eastern part of the Netherlands in 1952, van Klinken spent his early childhood in Doom, a small island of Sorong in what is now known as West Papua, after his family moved there in 1956.

His father was a police officer who trained would-be Papuan officers, though he accepted the role more for his enthusiasm to explore the then Dutch colony.

The family moved back to the Netherlands in 1962, three years before West Papua's integration into the newly independent Indonesia.

"But like any other Dutch family who had spent time in Indonesia, we found the Netherlands too small and too cold," the self-effacing scholar said.

His family decided to move to Australia where they found open space and nicer weather. To earn a living, his father became a businessman.

It was in Australia that van Klinken met Helene, who he married in 1976. The couple now have two grown up children, Ben and Rosie.

During the early years of their marriage, van Klinken and his wife talked about making a trip to Indonesia, the country that thrilled him with childhood memories.

So they departed for Indonesia, learnt Indonesian in Salatiga, Central Java, and made a trip through the archipelago as hippies in 1977.

After receiving MSc in geophysics from Macquarie University in Sydney in 1978, van Klinkan aspired to teach at universities in Indonesia.

However, since no jobs were available, he moved to Malaysia in 1979 and taught physics at universities for three years before moving back to Indonesia to teach physics at Satyawacana University, Central Java, in 1984 for seven years.

It was during this period van Klinken mingled with Indonesian intellectuals such as George Junus Aditjondoro, Arief Budiman, Ariel Heryanto and student activists like Stanley Adi Prasetya and Andreas Harsono, who gradually bolstered his passion for Indonesian politics.

Van Klinken witnessed and involved himself in a new generation of student activism at the time of the controversial development of a dam in Kedungombo, Central Java-a New Order development disaster that became a research topic for George Junus Aditjondro's PhD dissertation.

"But it was the late Herbert Feith who really excited me about Indonesian study and influenced me seriously to switch to this area of study," van Klinken said.

Herbert Feith was an Australian academic whose work on Indonesia was greatly referred to by many scholars.

Van Klinken completed his PhD in Indonesian history from Griffith University with a dissertation on political biographies of three Indonesian Christian figures, Amir Syarifuddin, Kasimo and Sam Ratulangi.

He later became editor of the Australian quarterly magazine Inside Indonesia (1996-2002), publishing stories on the people of Indonesia, their culture, politics, economy and environment.

From 1999 to 2002 van Klinken became resident director in Yogyakarta for the Australian Consortium of In-Country Indonesian Studies (ACICIS).

The Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor (CAVR) also recruited him as research advisor from 2002 to 2004.

"Basically since 1998, I have been working on contemporary Indonesia. Ethnic and religious conflicts are really a new chapter in Indonesian history," he said, referring to violence that engulfed some areas in Indonesia after the collapse of the New Order regime.

Van Klinken was especially disturbed by what he dubs "the silence in Jakarta" about ethnic cleansing in Central Kalimantan,

where a sizable Madurese population was reportedly massacred and driven out of the territory during a terrible bloodbath with other ethnic groups in Central Kalimantan.

Madurese figures in Jakarta like Amir Santoso, Didik Rachbini and Atmonegoro tried hard to speak on behalf of the victims but to no avail, van Klinken said.

"So there was a crisis in the conception of Indonesian citizenship," he said.

The Education, Internalization, and Implementation of Pancasila (P4) program that had been enforced for decades was called into question after the collapse of the New Order.

Post-1998 also saw four streams of political changes, van Klinken said.

First was the cosmopolitan movement, where elite intellectuals like Garin Nugroho produced movies about being an Indonesian at the time of the crisis.

Second was the Islamist movement, which saw the mushrooming of Islamic-oriented political parties with narrowminded conceptions of Indonesian citizenship.

Third was the putra daerah, or "local son", a revival of pride in local identity, which also neglected migrants that had also lived in an area for a long time, such as the Madurese in Central Kalimantan.

Fourth was the labor movement, with more worker unions established, along with a new generation of labor activists.

"Another interesting phenomenon is the revival of Indonesian-Chinese identity. Many of my Indonesian-Chinese friends began to write about their own social identities and Chinese cultural inheritance in Indonesia," van Klinken said.

He mentioned people like Ong Hok Ham, Liem Soei Liong, Andreas Susanto and Stanley Adi Prasetya.

"For example, I asked human rights activist Liem Soei Liong to present his paper on Indonesia's human rights situation for an upcoming conference on the Indonesian reformasi movement at Universiteit van Amsterdam this May, but he refused because he

said he wanted to write specifically about the Chinese now," van Klinken said.

Liem Soei Liong is a co-founder and editor of the UK-based Tapol magazine, which regularly reports human rights abuses by Indonesian authorities.

Van Klinken's passion for Indonesia has also been passed on to his wife. Helene is now completing her PhD at Queensland University in Australia.

Her dissertation is about East Timorese children who were taken away to live in Indonesia.

"There were mixed motives, human and religious motives and thousands of East Timorese children (were involved)," he said.

There was also evidence that an emotional bond developed between Indonesian soldiers and Timorese youths during the Indonesian occupation.

Back then many East Timorese youths were employed by the Indonesian army as Tenaga Bantuan Operasi (TBO) or Operational Force Assistants.

Van Klinken said Alfredo Reinado, an East Timorese military renegade and rebels' leader who was killed during a recent failed coup in East Timor, was one such example.

In May 2006, Reinado led a revolt against the government after its controversial dismissal of 600 soldiers in the newly independent country.

Back then the young Reinado was a TBO and was taken to Indonesia by a soldier he had become close to.

"But the soldier's family mistreated him as they considered him to be a burden, as they already had children to raise," van Klinken said. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, Tuesday, April 1, 2008

Tracing Van Gogh's Legacy: His Works and Tragic Life

hen my colleagues invited me on a tour of the Van Gogh Museum, I immediately accepted the invitation. I have always wanted to see Vincent van Gogh's original masterpieces that symbolized the important junctures of his life—from his artistic development, sorrowful romance and illness to his suicide.

The museum attracts around one million visitors annually from all over the world. It houses 200 paintings, almost 500 drawings, four sketchbooks and 800 letters.

With headphones, visitors can be guided on an audio tour that passes almost every painting in the museum and other art collections.



On the first floor, I was met with an assortment of Van Gogh's paintings displayed in a chronologic order. The second floor of the museum offers provisional educational presentations, including subjects on restitution research and works on paper. The third and ground floors display a 19th century art collection.

The museum also houses a restaurant and shop that sells memorabilia from books and replicas of paintings to cups featuring Van Gogh's image.

However, it was the journey to episodes of his life and his artistic development that deeply thrilled me.

Van Gogh was born March 30, 1853, in Groot Zundert, the Netherlands. He left school at the age of 15 and never returned.



No one thought he was gifted enough to become an artist at the age of 27. Yet, after ten years he had produced 800 paintings and more than 1,000 drawings, as well as sketches and watercolor pieces.

Unlike Indonesian painter Raden Saleh, who received lessons from several patrons in Europe, or Basuki Abdullah, who received formal training in The Hague, Van Gogh was mostly self-taught. He merely joined a number of lessons at art academies, read textbooks and received guidance from artist colleagues.

During a 19-month stormy relationship with Clasina Maria Hoornik—a pregnant, unmarried woman with a young daughter his talent evolved quickly. His paintings during this time reflected a deep sense of anguish and personal emotion.

In Nuenen, he painted working farmers and weavers with their looms. In 1882 he started using oil paints, which he used mostly in the coming year. During the winter of 1884-1885, he captured farmers and their wives in more than 40 paintings, before producing his first large famous piece The Potato Eaters.



Upon the invitation of his brother and art dealer Theo, Vincent lived in Paris from 1886-1888. Unable to afford models, he used his own face to trial colors and painting techniques. His canvases were covered with small speckles and lines in light, dazzling colors, resulting in 27 self-portraits.

He moved to the southern French town of Arles in February 1888, searching for inspiration from the landscape and light. He rented a house (which he later painted as The Yellow House), aspiring to establish an artists' settlement with Paul Gauguin and other painters.

But in December 1888, a quarrel sparked and Van Gogh angrily cut off a piece of his own ear. It was later discovered that he suffered from epilepsy.

In April 1889, he was treated in a mental clinic in Saint-Remy. He painted everything there—the rooms, other patients, the corridors and the garden. Sometimes he worked outdoors on landscapes characterized by cypress and olive trees.

He later lived in Auvers-sur-Oise, an artist's village near Paris, after leaving the clinic in May 1890. Van Gogh produced portraits of Paul Gachet, a doctor who was also an art collector, and his daughter as payment for the medical treatment he received.

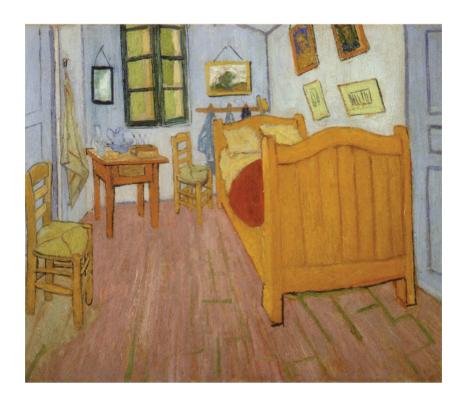
From then on, Vincent continued to suffer from depression. This culminated with Theo opting to quit his job to establish his own business.

Vincent shot himself in the chest with a revolver on July 27, 1890. He died two days later with his brother by his side. He was refused burial in the cemetery of the Catholic Church of Auvers, but burial was eventually allowed in the nearby township of Méry with a funeral held on July 30.

Theo inherited a large art collection that Vincent had sent him as compensation for financial support. But Theo died six months later, so it was Theo's widow, Jo van Gogh-Bongar, who acquired the collection.

The pieces at the core of this museum make it a fine record of Van Gogh's brilliant works of art and his dramatic life story.

Some of the artist's paintings might also be found in Indonesia,



given its colonial history. Nonetheless, so far only one of Van Gogh's pieces has reportedly been found in Indonesia—The Crocus Flowers, which belongs to Mr. Rudy Mulyono (it was acquired by his art-loving father long ago). •

First published by The Jakarta Post, Saturday, April 05, 2008

Dutch 'Cinemasia' Film Festival Bridges Cultural Divide

t was timely for the "CinemAsia" film festival to screen Asian movies in the Netherlands (April 2-13)—a country where multiculturalism has recently faced a deep crisis due to Geert Wilders' anti-Islam movie.



With Indonesian Joko Anwar's thriller Kala and Dimas Djayadiningrat's jesting comedy Quickie Express participating in the festival, it was hopefully an eye-opener for Dutch society to see the Southeast Asian country with the largest Muslim population

in the world bring the once taboo topics of sex and homosexuality to the big screen.

The festival, which screened more than 50 films from countries spanning the globe, offered rare evidence of booming talent which is crossing cultural and geographic borders.

"Asian cinema used to be so ethnocentric—Japanese films were made with Japanese actors in Japan," festival director Doris Yeung told The Jakarta Post.

Now, beside films produced in home countries, the Asian diaspora are working industriously to depict a cultural intersection of dilemma and stereotypes, as insightful stories to be told to the world.

This is not to reinforce the Asian stereotypes such as Chinese cooks or martial arts practitioners, but rather to contribute to a more nuanced, less stereotypical depiction of Asian communities living outside Asia.







(Photos: The Jakarta Post)

"Because of this, CinemAsia FilmLab offered three young talented Dutch filmmakers with Asian backgrounds an opportunity to present their work at the festival," CinemAsia board member Reza Kartose said.

He referred to Tati Wirahadiraksa, Hesdy Lonwijk and Vivian Wenli Lin.

Tati Wirahadiraksa, who is half-Indonesian and half-Dutch, directed a documentary titled Images from Another World. The film is about a Chinese-Indonesian woman who migrated to the Netherlands from Indonesia, struggling to reshape her own Asian-Dutch identity.



Efforts to deconstruct the stereotypes were even evident on the very first day, with the screening of slapstick comedy Finishing the Game by Justin Lin (U.S.). Lin directed a mockumentary of the making of The Game of Death, Bruce Lee's final film.

Set in the 1970s, he satirizes the typecasting of Asians in film by humorously showcasing the troubles encountered in the making of the film. Everybody—tall, short, even Caucasian—has an equal opportunity to become "Bruce Lee".

"I was happy to take part in it because I didn't need to master kung fu," main actor Roger Fan said (followed by audience laughter) during a Q&A session after the screening.



The second day presented Dark Matter (Chen Shi-zheng, U.S./China), The Most Distant Course (Iin jin jie, Taiwan) and The Drummer (Kenneth, Hong Kong/Taiwan).

Dark Matter is about sharp Chinese physics student Xing's research—which leads him to a snare of academic resentment at an American university. The Most Distant Course tells a story of a young Taiwanese man who sends his lover tapes of sounds he records on his journeys through stunning Taiwan scenery. The Drummer is about a man who takes up Chinese Zen drumming.

The third day screened a moving documentary, China's Stolen Children (Jezza Neumann (China/U.K.), comedy Getting Home (Zhang Yang, China), Hong Kong style action romance Blood Brothers (Alexie Tan, Hong Kong) and a Japanese night life tale The Great Happiness Space—Tale of an Osaka Love Thief (Jake Clennell, Japan).

The fourth day saw a Taiwanese interpretation of the classic French film Le Voyage du Ballon Rouge (Hou Hsiano Hsien, France/Taiwan) and a Japanese drama AYSL—Park and Love Hotel (Izuru Kamasaka, Japan).

The fifth day presented CinemAsia Mix Shorts and CinemaAsiaFilmLab, which included the documentary, Images from Another World.

Indonesia's short 10-minute flick, The Matchmaker, directed

by Cinzia Puspita Rini was also shown on the eleventh day.

And the closing day honored Indonesia's Kala and Quickie Express. Kala, which has been screened at 27 film festivals all over the world, is considered the country's first futuristic noir thriller.

"Kala is superb, and demonstrates that Indonesia's movies have the potential to compete with Western movies," movie enthusiast Matthias Fischer said.



(Photo: The Jakarta Post)



(Photo: The Jakarta Post)

Quickie Express, which is about a male escort service company, made audiences laugh at every turn.

"It would delight Dutch audiences here ... Ouickie Express should be shown in commercial theaters," said Felicitas Speth von Schulzburg, from the International Performing

Arts Institute.

Kala's director, Joko Anwar, said he would be pleased if his movie could penetrate the market here.

"But it would me more effective for Indonesian film makers to collect their energy together, rather than going to film festivals individually, which seems to be the case now," said Ekky Imanjaya from Amsterdam University's Department of Media and Culture.

Djauhari Oratmangun, from the Indonesian Embassy (which also supported the festival as part of the Visit Indonesia 2008 campaign) said the embassy was more than ready to facilitate

a large Indonesian film festival in the Netherlands—an opportunity which should be tapped by Indonesia's film industry.

Asked whether Asian movies can penetrate the Dutch mainstream film culture, Martin Egter from television outlet NOS Journaal said there is still a gap between Asian and Dutch movies.

"Only those who can feel the pulse of Asian cultures will enjoy their movies," he said.



(Photo: The Jakarta Post)

"So, we need more rigorous promotion," said Hong Kong-born Dutch actor Aaron Wan, adding that the festival contributed to the endorsement of Asian movies within the Netherlands' increasingly multicultural society. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, Saturday, April 19, 2008

Tati Wirahadiraksa: Promoting Multiculturalism through Film in The Netherlands

ati Wirahadiraksa could not hide her excitement upon hearing her documentary film had been chosen to be screened at the Amsterdam CinemAsia Film Festival recently.

The festival, which screens more than 50 films from countries all over the world, showcases flourishing talent that crosses both geographical and cultural borders.

"I think they (Asian films) are underrepresented (here). That is



why I like to make my contribution," Tati told The Jakarta Post during a recent interview at Rialto cinema in southern Amsterdam.

Her documentary film, Images from Another World, is about a Chinese-Indonesian woman who migrated from Indonesia to the Netherlands. The woman, Anita Lim, struggled to discover her own identity as an Asian-Dutch woman.

The story depicts how Lim, amid her own personal struggles in reshaping her own cultural identity, created choreography through the improvisation of Chinese calligraphy.

Two other Dutch filmmakers with an affinity for Asian communities, Hesdy Lonwijk and Vivian Wenli Lin, also participated in the festival. Their pieces were expected to help shore up Asian-Dutch representation in the Dutch film and

television industry.

Successful Asian-Dutch film directors—like Yan Ting Yuen, Fow Pyng Hu and In-Soo Radstake—do exist in the country, but their numbers are dwindling.

Some believe this is not only due to prejudices still lingering among film industry executives, but also because many Asian-Dutch youths prefer careers that are deemed to have "better" job prospects, such economics or computer science, over film.

"The festival had a lot of publicity and visitors ... it represented our statement of 'making films in the context of the Asian diaspora'," Tati said.

She said it was not easy to make it in the film industry here.

"There are many who want their product shown and there is only limited space, but I am sure that if a film or documentary is good, it will find its way to (reach) an audience.

"I am focusing on making something good, something worthwhile, something with my whole heart," she said.

Tati's interest in multicultural theater and film is inseparable from the fact that she grew up in a mixed family. Half-Dutch, half-Indonesian, Tati has been a multicultural theater enthusiast since she was young.

Born on Sept. 22, 1967 in Amsterdam, Tati studied psychology at Amsterdam University. However, after one year she just could not resist her passion and decided to switch to theater studies at the same university, where she graduated in 1994.

She immersed herself in the study of multicultural theater and her passion was manifested in her thesis, which was an exploration of the government subsidy on multicultural theaters in the Netherlands.

"After the 1980s, the government began to provide earmarked subsidies to non-Dutch theater," said Tati, whose father hails from Bandung, West Java.

Tati said "non-Dutch" people were those living in the Netherlands who were mostly Moroccan, Turk and Surinamese

descendants whose cultures and traditions were overshadowed by liberal European-Dutch culture.

She said their history in the Netherlands—a multicultural society—can be traced back to the 1950-60s when the country was experiencing a shortage of cheap laborers.

"The Netherlands attracted people from countries like Morocco and Turkey. We also have people from former colonies living here, like Indonesia and Suriname, and we have economic and politic refugees from all over the world. So there are many people living here for many reasons," Tati said.

Tati said she had worked for several theater groups, including Diagonaal, Monsterverbond, Toneelgroep Ceremonia and Untold (1992-2005).

When asked about the current state of the Netherlands as a multicultural society, which many deem as a failure here, Tati said: "That is a very complex matter. Unfortunately (now) there are many people thinking differently who see (other) people a threat to their lives. There is the huge problem of misunderstanding and not knowing each other well, which creates a climate of racism. I am not happy with that."

"On the other hand, I see a lot of good things happening. We are living in a global world and people have to get used to the idea that boundaries and borders are not so restricted anymore as they were before," she said, adding film could become a medium by which to promote understanding among people.

After studying theater at the Mime-School of the Arts for a year, Tati continued her studies at the Open Studio and Media Academy where she learned more about film editing in 2003.

She completed an editing apprenticeship at the Dutch television station Nederlandse Christelijke Radio Vereniging.

She later edited for documentaries such as Undocumented (about a Ghanaian pastor who works with illegal people, shown in the internationally respected de Balie theater), Urban Lifestyle (about an urban youth program, shown on The Box television

station) and Memento Mori (a documentary from Saskia Vredeveld about the work of photographer Roger Ballen).

Tati also worked for Noord Holland radio and TV, editing news and various programs.

Moving from theater to filmmaking was a challenging undertaking, but she said there were some constructive overlaps.

Asked about her upcoming projects, the mother of one said she aimed to produce a documentary on Indonesian people from a different angle, "telling about their loss and struggle during colonialism and how they managed to win their independence".

"Because such a story is seldom told here ... many times the stories are (merely) about people who moved to the Netherlands after Indonesia's independence," Tati said.

Other stories, she said, are even trapped in the stereotypical portrayal of the "alien and exotic" depiction of Indonesian people and their islands.

Tati, whose favorite genre of music is soul, indie and reggae, believes film can serve as a mode by which to appreciate more of what is evolving now in both countries, in the area of arts, religion, politics, youth culture and other contemporary aspects of society.

"Holland and Indonesia have a partially shared history, but we don't hear much of Indonesia in the media here nowadays. I think film can be one of the means by which to get to know each other better." •

First published by The Jakarta Post, Saturday, April 19, 2008

Springtime Splendor in Keukenhof

he world-famous spring garden Keukenhof, also known as the Garden of Europe, offers the visitors more than 4.5 million tulips just an hour outside of Amsterdam.

It takes about an hour to get there from the city, and with a Combi-ticket I switched from one bus to the Keukenhof shuttle bus at Schipol. Even early in the morning, flocks of young and old queued to get on the bus, evidence that Keukenhof's gorgeousness was surely arresting.



Located outside the town of Lisse in southern Haarlem, Keukenhof (which literally means "kitchen garden" and historically belonged to Joba van Beieren, the 15th century countess of Holland) features beds of tulips, daffodils, crocuses and other beautiful flowers. Some 15 kilometers of footpaths let you walk amid them all.

The huge garden, whose landscape was designed by

architect Zocher in 1857, covers an area of 32 hectares with 100 varieties of tulips and some 7 million bulbs planted by hand. The matchless garden also has 2,500 trees comprising 87 species.

While Dutch politicians were still debating China's human rights violations in Tibet this year, Keukenhof defiantly opted for the theme of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, variously expressed in colorful gardens and shows.



More than 90 participants exhibited flower bulbs and the garden had utilized layered planting to ensure a permanent flow of color throughout the season.

Approximately 6,500 kilos of grass seeds are also sown annually to plow an unsullied green turf in addition to the multicolor finery of flowers.

The walking didn't tire me, as the fresh fragrance of the bulbs splashed onto my body everywhere I went. Thousands of flowers burst in bloom just before my eyes.

The park is only open during spring (March 20 to May 18 this year) since the bulbs bloom only during this season; other months are used for park maintenance and bulb planting.

Back in the 17th century the rich used to spend a lot of money on tulips. For this reason, tulip mania came into fashion everywhere. One record cites that traders could reap roughly 30,000 euros a month from this business.

The idea to utilize the park came from then mayor of Lisse Mr. Lambooy in 1949 in an effort to bolster the country's position as the world's largest flower exporter. Exhibitions were conducted with



the participation of growers from throughout the Netherlands and neighboring countries.

The garden became a centerpiece for the bulb trade. Nowadays the most beautiful bulb flowers are ensured by around 90 Royal Warrant Holders to be on annual display.

A contest among planters is held within various pavilions, with the Vaste Keurings Comissie judges rating the best specimens from tulips to chrysanthemums for the Keukenhof Award.

Various garden styles, from English to the nature garden with a mix of bulbs, bushes and perennials, characterize this large estate. In particular, the Flower Forest which has a blend of bulb flowers and veranda planting in fashionable color schemes has brought about the charm of aged trees but with imposing scenery.

Exotic flowers such as orchids are also found. The 1,000-meter-square Beatirx Pavilion houses various species of flowers and plants.

The Prince Willem Alexander pavilion with an area of 6,000 meters runs an exhibition of approximately 35,000 lilies from May 8th to 18th.

However, Keukenhof is not only about flowers; it also exhibits aesthetic sculptures from some 50 artists.

There is also a 116-year-old mill on the far side of the garden, which was brought from the province of Groningen 51 years ago. And for chess enthusiasts, the garden provides a giant chess game for you to play.

Kids will love the park's vast playground with a labyrinth and an educational animal enclosure. Children could be guided through the Bollebozen treasure hunt, showing them the finest spots of the garden.

Having a meal at the garden's restaurant, I watched how people endlessly admired the beauty of the bulbs.

I reflected to myself why people are so fervent in cultivating the beauty of nature, realizing it is



this beauty that should add to the quality of our lives—not the "beauty" of superficiality that we often encounter in our modern everyday life. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, May 18, 2008

Personal Growth Course Travels to The Netherlands

n a time when competition is high and a hedonistic way of life sometimes pervasive, a training program recently tried to inject new spirit into people's lives at an Indonesian Diaspora meeting in the Netherlands.

The Emotional and Spiritual Quotient (ESQ), founded by Ary Ginandjar, is a multi-media training program to encourage personal growth in leadership, well-being and Islamic spiritual values.

The three-day course is conducted in a theatrical manner, sometimes directly engaging—and challenging—participants.

"Do you love your children or God?" yelled trainer Syamsul Rahman against the backdrop of a movie of the Prophet Ibrahim, who was instructed by God to slaughter his son Ismail.



Syamsul said that after the training, participants would not be bogged down with despair over the loss of loved ones or when they fail to reach their targets in work.

"There is always a blessing in disguise," he said on the sidelines of the presentation, adding that participants were gently encouraged to reflect on many aspects of their life, both the successes and failures.

Syamsul was flown in from Indonesia to deliver the recent training in a huge sport gym in the city of Delft, between Rotterdam and the Hague.

Creative leadership exercises and games were also presented to pump up the intellectual, social and entrepreneurial aspects of the participants.

William Satriaputra de Weerd, an Indonesian living in the Netherlands who organized the training, said there had been 350 ESQ alumni in the country since it was first conducted in 2006.

"Thirty-six participants today are from around Europe such as the Netherlands, France and the UK," said William, who has lived in the Netherlands since 1974.

Couple Mujilah and Hans Ham from Amsterdam said the training had given them time to reflect on their everyday lives.

"It releases us from our regular stress," said Mujilah.

"The training is a breakthrough in examining the human mind; it goes beyond contemporary approaches," said surgeon Hisham from London.

His wife, IT consultant Azlin, said they had promising careers and money but something had been missing. "We have found it here," she said.

Ahmad Fathan Aniq from Leiden had a slightly different perspective.

"While I don't really agree with using scientific explanations for the Koran, because it restricts the holy book into time-space bounds, the leadership and emotional development in the training is really mentally refreshing."

"I feel that I have been able to revitalize all the positive values that are already embedded but underdeveloped deep in our psyches," he said.

The first day of the training fell under the theme Inner Journey, where participants joined interactive dialogues filled with philosophical stories, exercises and games to enable them to identify their personal potential.

The second day was Outer Journey, introducing participants to the vastness of the universe and the unlimited potential it offers our lives.

The last day focused on Building Creativity, exploring possible action, missions in life, character building and self-control.

While a majority of the participants were Muslims, anyone was welcome in the course, William said.

"Now there are around 500,000 alumni in Indonesia and 3,000 of them are non-Muslims," Syamsul added.

Syamsul said due to the increasing demand, founder Ary was now in the process of designing "ESQ Universal" to reach wider audiences including non-Muslims "so that everyone can fully benefit from this program." •

First published by The Jakarta Post, June 12, 2008

Emha Ainun Najib: Delivering the Message of Peace

hen a group of priests from the Dutch Protestant Church approached renowned Indonesian poet and Muslim scholar Emha Ainun Najib to ask him to stage a performance of his musical band Kiai Kanjeng in the Netherlands, Emha did not think twice about accepting.

The offer was made not long after the release of Geert Wilder's controversial movie Fitnah.

"They wanted us to help reduce the tension and enhance understanding among religious communities," Emha told The Jakarta Post on the sidelines of Kiai Kanjeng's performance at the Islamic Cultural Center in Deventer, the Netherlands.

He acknowledged there was a section of the Muslim



community that spoke the language of intolerance and that was committed to acts of violence against those whose religions or opinions differed from theirs.

"The world has seen tension among religious communities. I have never seen such a growing hostility in my life ... When I was a child, things like this never happened," said Emha, also known as the "renaissance figure of Indonesian culture".

Emha is unlike other Muslim leaders, who are often in a state of denial regarding the gap between the normative and the practice of Islam.

"We have laws that should anticipate this and deal with (those who commit violence)," he said between puffs of a kretek (Indonesian clove cigarette) during a stroll in downtown Deventer.

"However, there are also other groups who advocate peace and tolerance among us, and we should give them more chances so their voices can be heard by people all over the world," he said, giving the example of the Dutch Muslim and Protestant Women's Association in Deventer, which aims to foster understanding among religious communities.

Emha's musical group, Kiai Kanjeng, is currently embarking on a tour in several cities in the Netherlands: Rotterdam, The Hague, Amsterdam, Zwolle, Leeuwarden, Deventer, Nijmegen and Etten-Leur from Oct. 8 to Oct. 19.

Emha has also held dialogues with various religious communities during his cultural tour here.

"The spirit is to recognize humanity everywhere in every nation, group and religion, and to respect and love all humanity, wherever it exists.

"The East is in the West, and the West is in the East," said Emha, whose wife and singer Novia Kolopaking is also a member of Kiai Kanjeng's 15-strong entourage.

Muhammad (Emha) Ainun Nadjib was born in Jombang, East Java, on May 27, 1953, the fourth of 15 children.

He was expelled from Gontor Ponorogo Islamic boarding school near Surakarta for leading a demonstration against the school's security department during his third year of study.

He later graduated from Muhammadiyah senior high school but later only managed to study for one semester at the Faculty of Economics at Gadjah Mada University.

Emha's first anthology of poetry titled "M" Frustasi (the

Frustration of "M") was published in 1975. With his colleagues, he set up theater group Teater Dinasti. It did not take long for him to establish himself as a foremost figure on Yogyakarta's poetry scene.

Living for five years on Yogyakarta's downtown Jl. Malioboro, Emha studied literature with his most revered Sufi-teacher Umbu Landu Paranggi, who is believed to have led a mystical life.

Umbu greatly influenced Emha's work, which is often described as deeply religious and philosophical but esthetic.

He was later involved in various literary debates over ideas he introduced, which included "contextual literature" and "literature of liberation". The former rejects elitism in the arts and the latter campaigns for more freedom in the arts.

Between the 1970s and 1980s, Emha was most productive in producing poetry. Some of his works from this period include Sajaksajak Sepanjang Jalan (Poems Along the Road, 1977), Tak Mati-Mati (The Immortal, 1978) and Tidur Yang Panjang (Long Sleep, undated).

Some of his essays, poems and play performances satirized the repressive Soeharto regime. As a result, Emha earned a certain measure of "notoriety" and often was in the company of a security entourage.

While he was threatened with defamation against the regime, Emha was persistent in pursuing dialogue. He was once involved in a heated debate with the then chief of social and political department of the Indonesian military Syarwan Hamid in the media on the course of the nation.

From 1984 to 1986, Emha lived in Amsterdam and The Hague, the Netherlands. In The Hague, he assisted Prof. C. Brower of the Institute of Social Studies in conducting workshops on religion, culture and development.

"The themes were mostly political messages against authoritarian regimes," he recalled, adding that it was during the heyday of Soeharto in Indonesia, and Pinochet in Chile.

He said his stay in the Netherlands was a critical juncture in his life, "It contributed to my personal transformation".

Back in Indonesia, the father of Letto band's vocalist Noe set up a monthly gathering known as Padhang Bulan (Full Moon) in 1989 in Jombang, East Java, which attracted thousands of supporters who were enthusiastic about music, poetry and religious and socio-political debating.

Ironically, this is when he produced Santri-Santri Khidir (Students of Khidir) with the Salahudin Theatre in 1990, staged on the field of Islamic boarding school Gontor, which had expelled him many years before.

Emha was engaged in the reform movement that led to the downfall of Soeharto's regime in 1998. He was among nine prominent Muslim leaders invited to meet then president Soeharto minutes before he resigned. However, his role in ensuring the smooth exit of Soeharto has always been misunderstood and controversial.

He set up another monthly gathering called Kenduri Cinta (Feast of Love) in 2000 to stimulate love among people affected by displacement and poverty.

In recent years, Emha has traveled abroad extensively, including to Australia, the U.S., the UK and Europe, either participating in literary festivals or embarking on cultural tours with Kiai Kanjeng.

However, according to Ian L. Betts, author of Jalan Sunyi Emha (Emha's Silent Pilgrimage), despite Emha's popularity and his massive influence on Indonesia's social discourse, his work is not really part of the Indonesian literary mainstream.

Still, in 2005 he received The Muslim News Award of Islamic Excellence in London. A year later, at a series of keynote panels at the Melbourne Writer's Festival, Emha spoke on Islam and relations between Indonesia and Australia post-Bali terrorist bombing.

When asked why there is still religious tension among communities nowadays, Emha said, "there has been misinterpretation of the holy book".

Emha argued that most of the Koran could be re-interpreted. He metaphorically compared the belief system to rice grains, which he said must be well cooked before becoming "edible" for all people.

He said there were some terminologies in Islam that had been misunderstood, even by Muslims. He cited as examples tafsir and jihad.

"Tafsir denotes attention, evaluation, assessment, in-depth analysis, drawing conclusions and making choices about a thing or situation," he said.

"Jihad means struggle or effort. A man or woman who works to support a family is performing jihad, anyone who works in the social interest can be said to be a mujahid, or one who conducts iihad."

Lastly, Emha said, the religious tension was also due to the social, political and economic interests of certain sections of society that were benefiting from such tensions. •

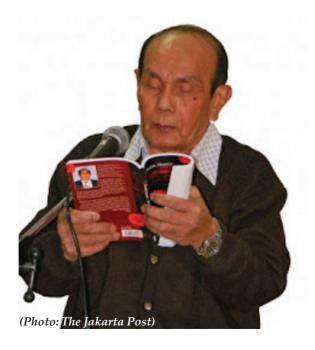
First published by The Jakarta Post, October 18, 2008

Chalik Hamid: Poetic Love of Country Lives On

hen poet Chalik Hamid left Indonesia on Feb. 4, 1965, to study journalism in Albania, he had no idea he would not return for 30 years.

Just seven months after he had left the country—and his pregnant wife—Indonesia experienced some of the defining moments in its modern history: the killing of the generals, the fall of the giant Indonesian Communist Party and the alleged massacre of its followers.

Because of his own communist history, even though he was far away in Albania, Chalik's life was changed forever.



The Indonesian Communist Party—then the world's thirdlargest political party with three million members—was accused by some sections in the military of attempting to stage a coup d'etat and of having a role in killing the generals.

Indonesia found itself caught in a bitter feud between two competing ideologies: communism and capitalism.

Capitalism won, with the support of the United States, and Indonesia underwent years of bloodbath with the alleged massacre of around half a million followers of the Indonesian Communist Party.

Although Chalik was abroad, the fact he had been sent there by the country's first president Sukarno, who was accused of siding with the left, turned out to be a lifelong curse.

Like many others who were sent abroad to study, Chalik lost his Indonesian citizenship and was barred from returning home by the New Order regime, which was seeking to eradicate all communist influences in the country.

Chalik was not allowed to see his wife Sri Sutiati, whom he had married in May 1964. He also had to bury his dream of seeing his baby daughter Chasrita, who was born on March 19, 1965—barely a month after he left the country.

"I was distressed and disoriented," Chalik told The Jakarta Post at the 20th anniversary celebration of Vereniging Persaudaraan, an organization that gathers hundreds of former students who were barred from going home following the events of 1965.

At the gathering, Chalik read some of the poems from his recently released book Mawar Merah (Red Roses), published by Ultimus.

"I couldn't sleep for months, trying to grasp what was actually going on in my beloved homeland," he said.

He dealt with the stress by running long distances—and continuing his lifelong love of writing poetry.

Born in the city of Kisaran, Asahan, North Sumatra, on May 16, 1938, Chalik graduated from Taman Siswa junior high school in Kisaran in 1958 before going onto SMA Pembaruan high school in Medan. He continued his studies at Art Academy in Medan and Aliarcham Social Science Academy in Jakarta.

In junior high school, Chalik industriously wrote poems, which were published in Taman Siswa's magazine and Lembaga daily.

Later his work was published in Jalan Baru, Harian Harapan, Waspada, Indonesia Baru, Gotong Royong, Harian Patriot and Cerdas in Medan. He also sent his work to publications in Jakarta such as Bintang Timur and Harian Rakyat.

He once received a literary award from Harian Rakyat for his distinguished work.

In his youth, Chalik often read his poems and short stories on the state-run radio RRI in Medan under the guidance of Prof. Bakri Siregar and Sy. Anjasmara.

He also liked to perform in dramas, taking a lead role in productions of dramatic adaptations, including Utuy Tatang Sontani's Si Kabayan, Dostoyevsky's Dosa dan Hukuman (Crime and Punishment) and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Orang-orang Baru dari Banten (New People from Banten).

These plays were often directed by famous artists of the time, including Bakri Siregar, Hr. Bandaharo, Sy. Anjasmara, Aziz Akbar and Kamaludin Rangkuty.

As a student, Chalik was also active in Indonesia's student association. He was elected chairman of the Sumatra branch in 1961 during its sixth congress in Jakarta, and from 1961 to 1964 was chairman of the Medan branch of Lekra (People's Cultural League) and one of the presidium at North Sumatra's Lekra.

Lekra is the cultural and literary wing of the Indonesian Communist Party, which had a sizable membership from artists from various fields.

As a young student activist, Chalik was critical of any form of exploitation. He once led a movement spraying graffiti on the American General Council building in Medan to protest against the takeover of a plantation in Sumatra by a foreign joint-plantation corporation.

But the events of 1965 crushed his activism and his dream to develop Indonesia's literary world.

The one bright spot was that the Albanian government continued his scholarship until he graduated from the University of Tirana in 1969.

He had to resist calling his wife because he feared any form of direct communication could endanger her family.

"I sent my letters to my family through a third country like Peru, and this could take months," Chalik said.

Many family members of those associated with the banned Indonesian Communist Party had to undergo a harsh, often unimaginable life. They abruptly became social pariahs; they were unable to apply for government jobs or enroll in university.

Even children were "tagged" with the so-called Surat Bebas PKI, a certificate indicating that they were free from elements of the Indonesian Communist Party.

He later learned that his wife and daughter were forced to go into hiding in Kisaran, Java and Medan.

"Sri was finally captured and thrown in jail in 1967 without trial."

"She was only released in 1979. She went to see my mother to ask permission to marry my friend Astaman," Chalik said, adding he was relieved by her choice because her new husband was his friend and their marriage would be good for their daughter.

Chalik later married an Albanian woman, Katerina, with whom he had two children, Hervis and Rahardi, and worked as a radio broadcaster and translator at the Indonesian section of Tirana radio.

"People in South Sumatra could listen to Tirana radio," he said with a smile.

With friends he produced a magazine called Api Pemuda Indonesia (API, The Fire of Indonesian Youth), with an English edition Indonesian Tribune, to attack the New Order government.

However, he had to seek political asylum in the Netherlands in 1989 after communism crumbled in many parts of Eastern Europe.

Chalik finally visited Indonesia in 1995, when he stayed in the house of his ex-wife's family—a rather awkward situation, he found.

He has since visited Indonesia six times. He divorced his Albanian wife and married an Indonesian woman, Nur Aisah, in 2003.

The bitterness he feels about his life is reflected in Mawar Merah, in which he writes: "...the house is deserted, the room has lost its inhabitants, children and wife are kept waiting ... I have lost my eternal friend..."

But despite the bitterness, his love of his home country remains intact, he writes:

"... forty years I was barred from stepping foot on my homeland, but I am still loyal, I am still in love (with her)..." •

First published by The Jakarta Post, January 5, 2009

Mintardio: Indonesian at Heart

'hen young Mintardjo was sent to Helsinki, Finland, to attend the 1962 communist World Youth Festival and later to communist Romania to study, little did he know he would not return to Indonesia for many years because of unexpected political developments.

Just three years after he left his homeland, the then popular Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) collapsed and carnage among its followers ensued.

"I was not allowed to return to my homeland," he told The Jakarta Post during a recent interview at his modest house.

Now living in exile in the Netherlands, Mintardjo shows his love for Indonesia by earnestly helping Indonesian students studying in the country regardless of their ideology or religion providing them with accommodation, transport and a place to gather for social activities.



Born in Bagelan, Purworejo, June 6, 1936, Mintardjo attended several schools, including the Holland Indische School in Purwokerto, where he stayed with his grandfather, and a Catholicoriented Kanisius school in his hometown of Purworejo.

Just two months before Indonesia proclaimed its independence in August 1945, the Japanese arrested his father, accusing him of organizing two revolts against the Japanese.

In 1948, his father was shot dead, some say by the Indonesian military at the time (TNI), while others claim it was by the Dutch colonial army (KNIL). So Mintardjo was forced yet again to hop from one school to another.

Although Mintardjo always made time to attend various political gatherings regardless of their political orientation, he was never a member of any association. He preferred to be involved in organizing sports events such as soccer and volleyball matches for local youth. He became a member of a soccer player association alongside members of Young Indonesia, an organization created by the Youth Congress during the 1928 Youth Pledge.

So when Young Indonesia asked Mintardjo to attend the 8th World Youth Festival in 1962 in Helsinki, it was to help organize its soccer team.

Many national youth organizations joined the Helsinki youth summit, such as the People Youth, affiliated to the PKI, Indonesia's Muslim Youth (PII), the Association of Christian Students of Republic of Indonesia (PMKRI), the National Movement of Indonesian Students and the Concentration of Indonesian Student Movement (CGMI), which is affiliated with the PKI.

Then in a twist of fate, he received two callings from the small Eastern European country of Romania.

During the festival, Mintardjo first received an invitation from Romania Youth, affiliated with the Romanian Communist Party, to attend its Independence Day celebrations. Then Indonesian ambassador Sukrisno also offered him a chance to study in Romania.

Mintardjo's life changed from that moment on.

After 1965, where the PKI's power was removed and millions of its members executed, Indonesian ambassadors explained to Indonesian citizens living overseas at that time that they did not know what exactly had happened and "their position was to leave all matters to president Sukarno, the great leader of the revolution".

Mintardjo and students initially agreed but were then asked to change their stand to support General Soeharto's government.

When he and many of his friends steadfastly refused, their citizenship was scrapped against their own will in April 1967.

Mintardjo finally graduated from Vladimir University in 1969 in political economy. Later he worked as a civil servant at the Romanian tourism ministry and married Romanian Liliana Gabirella. They have three children—Heru Tjahjo, Ratnawati and Nurkasih.

When Romania's dictator Nicolae Ceausescu was executed and his communist regime collapsed during the 1989 bloody revolution, Mintardjo sought political asylum in the Netherlands

But Mintardjo still longed for the warmness of his home country.

Staying in Oegstgeest, very close to Leiden, Mintardjo welcomed to his house many Indonesian students who were studying in Leiden, a university known for its excellent Indonesian and Islamic study center.

In fact, it has almost become a tradition for students to use his modest house as a venue for activities, from the election Indonesian Student Association (PPI) executives to monthly discussions where students or guests present their scientific papers.

"I remember Pak Min and his wife cooked for about 50 people who performed at the Indonesian Cultural Night in Rotterdam," recalled Michael Putrawenas, former secretary-general of the PPI in the Netherlands.

His bicycle also became the "official" vehicle for PPI executives, said current PPI Leiden vice president Hilman Latief.

Mintardjo was also actively involved in every student discussion.

"I am happy if students remain critical and have a balanced perspective about issues," said Mintardjo, who also initiated the establishment of the Inter-Generation Dialogue association and later Sapulidi Foundation, which strengthens Indonesian younger and older generations residing in the Netherlands. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, March 30, 2010

Nico Schulte Nordholt: Dutch Scholar Demands 'Genuine' Recognition of 1945 Independence

hen Nico Schulte Nordholt and other prominent Dutch intellectuals signed and launched a petition demanding that the Dutch government should genuinely, in a political and moral sense, recognize Aug. 17, 1945, instead of Dec. 27, 1949, as the birth of Indonesia's independence, they were shrugged off by many quarters of Dutch society.

This is because the then Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister, Ben Bot, when attending the national flag ceremony at the Merdeka Palace in Jakarta in 2005, had already stated the Dutch government accepted Aug. 17, 1945 as the historical start point of Indonesian independence.

"However, for the signatories of the petition this official stance of the Dutch government is not sufficient."

The signatories are convinced, he said, "that the acceptance of Aug. 17, 1945 as a historical fact is significantly different from our plea to a genuine recognition, in a political and a moral sense, of Aug. 17, 1945 as the birth of Indonesia's independence," Nordholt said during a recent discussion. It was on "pluralization of narratives on the history of Indonesian independence," recently held at Leiden University.

So why is "acceptance" not enough?

"By using 'acceptance', indeed a historical event, namely the proclamation, is no longer denied, but with 'acceptance' one does not acknowledge the deeper meaning of this proclamation, namely the fact that the Indonesian people have the right to proclaim their independence on the moment their leaders choose to act.

'Recognition' also implies the acknowledgment of the strong nationalist movement that had led to this proclamation, with all its political implications, also for the present," said Nordholt.

Born on Oct. 1, 1940, in Kefamenanoe, the capital of Timor Tengah Utara in West Timor province, Nordholt has long ties with Indonesia



His father, Herman Gerrit Nordholt, was a local official within the colonial administration. From 1936 to 1947 the family spent their time in Indonesia, including during the turbulent period of Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945.

He recalled how the Japanese imprisoned all the members of his family without trial for three years.

He also remembered how his mother, Oetje Zielhuis, taught his two elder sisters,

Johanna Gezina and Neeltje, school lessons at home.

After the Japanese surrender, many Dutch people returned home. However, his father was again posted in Kefamenanoe. He often accompanied his father on his duties when touring his district.

This experience gave Nordholt a sense of the pulse of the society he later lived in for many years again. In 1947, just two years after Sukarno and Hatta declared Indonesia's independence, his family returned to the Netherlands.

Asked if the petition would also do any good to Dutch society, he said there were four groups of "victims of history" residing in the Netherlands.

First, these were veteran soldiers who had served the Dutch East Indies; second, the "Eurasians" with Dutch and Indonesian backgrounds-many of whom had severely suffered atrocities during the independence movement.

The third group were the Moluccans, the ex-Dutch East Indies Army soldiers, shipped to the Netherlands with their families under the false argument of a "temporary arrangement"; and fourth, the Papuans, who arrived in the Netherlands after 1969.

"Recognition also implies the acknowledgment of the strong nationalist movement that had led to this proclamation."

He said if the Dutch eventually and genuinely recognize Aug. 17 1945 as Indonesia's day of independence, they should first settle the remaining problems that beset these groups of victims of history, including any family members currently living in the Netherlands.

Later, Nordholt's father became a history teacher, and in the 1960s he became professor in anthropology at the Free University in Amsterdam.

Nordholt finally decided to take up anthropology too. However, in 1961, when starting his studies,, Indonesia was closed to the Dutch, due to the dispute between the Netherlands and Indonesia over West Papua. Hence, his studies shifted among others to North Africa and Morocco.

In 1966, bilateral relations improved. He then followed lectures with Wim F. Wertheim at the University of Amsterdam.

A renown professor, Wertheim was regarded as the expert on modern Indonesia and was known for his strong support for Indonesia's independence revolution.

Nordholt completed his masters thesis in 1968 on the Pamong Praja, members of the nobility recruited into the colonial administration, who became the embrio of the nation's future bureaucracy.

His PhD research was on the role of the district head under the New Order from 1969 to 1979.

On the invitation of prominent scholar Selo Sumardjan, he lectured at the Faculty of Political and Social Science, at the University of Indonesia in 1981.

Nordholt also joined the Commission of Dialogue formed by the Dutch NGO, Novib, to support the then newly established Institute for Legal Assistance (LBH). The Institute rapidly became a thorn in the government's side for its critical voice on issues related to justice.

He recalled when he once sat with future president Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid at Lake Toba, while sharing durian, after a conference in August 1983, Gus Dur told him about his determination to democratize Indonesia using NU (Nahdlatul Ulama, the biggest Muslim organization in Indonesia) as his platform when he was elected as NU Chairman.

In December 1984 when the late Gus Dur chaired the NU, Nordholt was also at the center of Indonesia's pro-democracy movement in the 1990s.

Until 2008 Nordholt, who last taught at the Twente University in the Netherlands, still travels frequently to Indonesia for research, his persistent passion. •

First published in The Jakarta Post, July 8, 2010

Tracing The Life History of Javanese-Surinamese

Editors: Lisa Djasmadi, Rosemarijn Hoeftre, Hariette Mingoen. Publisher: KITLV Press, the Netherlands 2010 158 pages

hen Lisa Djasmadi got involved in writing and editing a book on Javanese people in Suriname, she discovered many heartening stories.

She had never heard stories like them before, chronicles of how her forefathers had departed from Java and arrived in Suriname, enduring numerous hardships along the way.

"They were very poor and had to work very hard. I am very proud that they had the courage to leave their motherland, settle in Suriname and later move to the Netherlands to build a new life. Very courageous," Lisa said during the book launching in The Hague.

The 158-page book-Migratie en culturreel erfgoed:



(Photo: The Jakarta Post)

Verhalen van Javanen in Suriname, Indonesie en Nederland (Migration and cultural heritage: Stories of Javanese in Suriname, Indonesia and the Netherlands) was published by the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) in collaboration with the Memorial Foundation Committee (STICHJI) in the Netherlands, the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) in Indonesia and the Memorial Javanese Immigration Association (VHJI) in Suriname.

The book assembles the life stories of three groups—the Javanese who migrated and settled for good in Suriname, the people who eventually left Suriname and settled in the Netherlands and those who had settled in Suriname but decided to return to Indonesia.

Between 1890 and 1939, 32,956 Javanese arrived in Suriname, mostly as contract laborers.

Only a quarter of them returned to Java when their contracts ended. Others returned to Indonesia later, stayed in Suriname or moved to the Netherlands.

KITLV, LIPI and VHJI tracked down Javanese-Surinamese in Indonesia and Suriname and interviewed them for the book, while STICHJI utilized life history methods to record people's stories. For the book, Lisa, who is half-Javanese, half-Dutch, interviewed Wim Soekarman Kromoredjo, who was born in Lelydorp, Suriname, but now lives in the Netherlands.

"I found him fascinating because he is very active in introducing Javanese traditions to the younger generation here

in the Netherlands, like ludruk [Javanese theater] and gamelan [Javanese traditional orchestra]. He uses Dutch when performing ludruk to reach younger audiences," Lisa said.

Wim, who plays both Surinamese and Indonesian versions of gamelan, says in the book that he is already accustomed to multiple identities, taking on Javanese



roles at home and Dutch qualities outside the house.

A study by Verkuyten and Brug in 2004 showed that for ethnic minorities like Surinamese in the Netherlands, personal achievement was positively correlated with ethnic identity for Surinamese men, but not Surinamese women.

In Wim's case, he sets aside his Javanese identity when outside the home and is a "real Dutch man" in the workplace.

Unlike Wim, whose parents brought him to the Netherlands, Sakri Ngadi's grandparents brought him back to Indonesia.

"The issue of returning to Indonesia was so hot at that time that it could cause a split within families," said Sakri, who was born in Saramacca, Suriname, but now lives in Jakarta.

Sakri's grandparents settled in Tongar, a small village in Sumatra, where they tried to open up the forest. But life was much harder than they expected. They were lured by wishes and hopes, as well as misleading stories that gold was everywhere in Sumatra. They were bitterly wrong.

Sakri's grandparents and many other Surinamese regretted their decision to return to the motherland and became deeply frustrated, advising others still in Suriname not to return to Indonesia. Some returnees even committed suicide.

During Indonesia's crisis in 1965, Sakri's mother nervously requested he return to Suriname. He refused because he did not want to leave his grandmother alone to face the country's bloody turbulence as his grandfather had already passed away.

After a long, difficult time, he finally found a better life after moving to Jakarta and finding work at the state banknote printer Peruri. Sakri has returned to Suriname several times to visit his mother and his siblings.

Sakri's story is a page from the life for Javanese-Surinamese who returned to Indonesia, and is one of many difficult and saddening accounts, said Hariette Mingoen, who is one of the editors of the book.

Interestingly, many Javanese-Surinamese who determined to

return to Indonesia did not return to Java, but to Sumatra instead.

This movement perhaps shows the courageous character of the Javanese from Suriname to explore another new frontier, facing an ever-uncertain future in building a new life.

Those who stayed in Suriname also struggled with identity issues and selfesteem. Rita Tjien Fooh-Hardjomohamad, who was born in Suriname's capital Paramaribo, said no one in her family ever attempted to return to Indonesia.

Even after Suriname's independence on Nov. 25, 1975, her family chose to stay in Suriname while many were moving to the Netherlands because of fears of instability in the newly independent state.

But, Rita found teenage life in rural Koewarasan restricting. Her parents were stern and raised her and her siblings under the strict rule of Islam.

"I did not have access to Javanese culture like ledek [dancer] or gamelan," she said.

In order to liberate herself, Rita aspired to a university education. She ended up getting two-year diploma in history in order to get a teaching job, as she did not want to burden her family for too long.

She became fascinated with history and eventually became the director of the National Archives, which often collaborates with similar institutions in Indonesia and the Netherlands.

Rita said, "Javanese women have to know what they stand for. They must be self-assured and know their own identity and not deny it. We are in Suriname, so we must be a part of Surinamese society, but we will never lose sight of our identity as Javanese".

The book project included young Javanese-Surinamese who acted as interviewers in the Netherlands, "to make them appreciate the legacy of the history of their ancestors," Hariette said.

The book is not intended as an academic book, she said. It was written by Javanese-Surinamese about themselves.

"This is the first book of its kind that comprehensively covers

three historically significant countries: Suriname, Indonesia and the Netherlands," she said.

After the book launch in The Hague, Erasmus Huis in Jakarta plans to have its own book launch with related activities on Jan. 20, 2011. A photo exhibition will run from Jan. 20 to Feb. 18, 2011. More info can be found at: www.minbuza.nl/PostenWeb/I/ Indonesi%C3%A/The Erasmus Huis Dutch Cultural Centre/ Programs. •

First published in The Jakarta Post, Sunday, January 09, 2011

Wim Manuhutu: Bridging Divisions in Maluku

hen Wim Manuhutu was appointed as one of the two directors of the Moluccan Historical Museum (currently Museum Maluku) in 1987, he vowed to run the museum professionally and without any political bias.

Hence, during the first exhibition the museum displayed pictures of four most important Malukan figures: Mr. Dr. Chr. Soumokil (second president of the of the South Moluccas or RMS), Dr. J. A. Manusama (third president of the RMS in the Netherlands), A. J. Patty, a journalist and Indonesian nationalist figure who was a member of Sarekat Ambon) and Dr. Johannes Leimena (also an Indonesian nationalist, and the minister of health in Sukarno's government).



RMS campaigned for an independent state of Maluku and is outlawed in Indonesia while Sarekat Ambon is a pro-Indonesia organization.

Wim recalled how members of the RMS in the Netherlands were angry that the picture of their respected figures were put up side by side with the Malukans who were on the Indonesian side.

"But we have to treat both RMS and pro-Indonesia Malukans as historical facts, after all history never has a single interpretation," he told The Jakarta Post during a recent interview.

As a result. Museum Maluku has become a neutral venue for Malukans in the Netherlands to meet and discuss Maluku's future regardless of their political differences.

Also during the sectarian conflict, which started in 1999, the museum was the place for both Christians and Muslim Malukans in the Netherlands to meet and elaborate on an action plan to help their brothers and sisters in the conflict-torn province in Indonesia.

Wim was born on May 14, 1959, in the Malukan camp Lunetten in Vught in the province of Brabant.

His father was a Malukan teacher when he was shipped with other KNIL soldiers to the Netherlands in 1951.

His mother was an Indo-Eurasian with Batavian blood who worked as a teacher at the camp.

The Lunetten is one of two Malukan camps in the Netherlands, the other is Westerbork in the province of Drenthe.

During the decolonization of Indonesia, 12,500 Malukans arrived in the Netherlands. They lived isolated from the Dutch since they always thought that they would return to Maluku with the support of the Dutch government, which never materialized.

Hence, distrust and misunderstanding marred relations between the Malukans and the Dutch government because the Dutch did not provide enough support for their aspiration for an independent state.

While people cared for each in the camps, conflicts often erupted too within the Malukan communities due to differing religions, areas of origin or political ideologies.

Later in the '60s and the '70s the children of the people who arrived in the Netherlands in 1951 came into adulthood. However, many resorted to violence to get attention for their aspiration for an independent state.

They shocked the Dutch and Malukan societies with a series of violent incidents such as the occupation of Wassenar (1970), Amsterdam (1975), Bovensmilde (1977) and Assen (1978) and the hijacking of trains in Wijster (1975) and De Punt (1977).

The '80s and '90s were times for Malukans to reorient their position in the Netherlands, their culture and traditions as well. Later appeared a third and fourth generation, who were gradually integrated into Dutch society, but did not forget their roots.

"Museum Maluku now has become a place for every Malukan to meet and learn about their history," said Wim, who studied history at Utrecht University and his MA thesis dealt with the expansion of Dutch rule on the island of Seram in the beginning of the 20th century.

During the large-scale violence in Maluku (1999-2004), Museum Maluku facilitated the Information and Documentation Center, which compiled and distributed news from Indonesia.

He recalled how Malukans here had been shocked with such violence and had difficulties believing that the violence really took place in their home villages, which had peaceful traditional alliances between villages.

Wim also recalled how Indonesian former president Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid, known for his tolerant and pluralist attitude, was received warmly by Malukan communities during his visit to the Netherlands in 2000.

In a rare show of support, Malukan communities demonstrated in support of Gus Dur and his presidency, but against the military's alleged involvement in the conflict, said Wim, who resigned from being a director of Museum Maluku in February 2009.

Asked about his opinion on SBY's abrupt cancellation of his

visit to the Netherlands, he said he regretted the incident because it had served to boost awareness of the RMS, which had launched a suit at the local Dutch court to arrest the Indonesian president over alleged human rights abuses in the province.

"Everybody knew that the court would reject the suit, as happened," he said, adding that as a regional player and member of the G20 Indonesia should have had the courage to frankly discuss the situation, including the alleged human rights abuses in the province, with Malukan communities here.

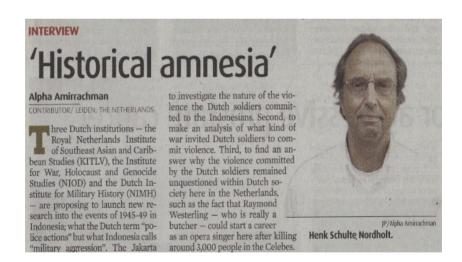
He also said that the RMS's aspiration for an independent state was actually no longer relevant because Indonesia had become a democracy with full-pledged decentralization and that Maluku would be better off being part of a democratic Indonesia despite many shortcomings.

He appealed to all to work together to improve the human rights situation and combat the still-rampant corruption in the province for the betterment of the people of Maluku. For information about Museum Maluku, visit http://www. museum-maluku.nl/ •

First published by The Jakarta Post, May 2 2011

Interview: 'Historical Amnesia'

hree Dutch institutions—the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD) and the Dutch Institute for Military History (NIMH)—are proposing to launch new research into the events of 1945-49 in Indonesia; what the Dutch term "police actions" but what Indonesia calls "military aggression". *The Jakarta Post* interviews KITLV research director Henk Schulte Nordholt.



Question: What is the motive behind this proposal?

Answer: It is triggered by the fact that the Dutch suffer from collective historical amnesia with regard to the events in 1945-49 in our former colony Indonesia. We only recalled what the Nazis did to us, but not what we did to the Indonesians, particularly in the period 1945-49. If we want to look into the future and move

forward we have to have a firm basis of what and who we are, including our ability to confront our both dark and bright sides of the past, otherwise it remains a shaky foundation.

What is the objective?

We have three objectives. First, to investigate the nature of the violence the Dutch soldiers committed to the Indonesians. Second, to make an analysis of what kind of war invited Dutch soldiers to commit violence. Third, to find an answer why the violence committed by the Dutch soldiers remained unquestioned within Dutch society here in the Netherlands, such as the fact that Raymond Westerling—who is really a butcher—could start a career as an opera singer here after killing around 3,000 people in the Celebes.

But the Dutch soldiers were also killed and many other Dutch civilians suffered from discrimination and humiliation in the hand of Indonesians. Will the research look into that too?

That is the setting and context that we need to look into to have an understanding of the violence committed by the Dutch towards Indonesians. We will look into that, but that is secondary to the violence committed by the Dutch. Our main interest is on our own soldiers and the violence they committed toward Indonesians.



Will the research look into the Dutch property and companies that were taken over by Indonesia?

We know that Dutch special troops were active in the plantation sector. After all, the first "military aggression" or "police action" was named "operation product", that was to liberate agricultural estate taken over by the Indonesians. So we will look into that because we are curious about what these Dutch special troops were doing in the plantation sector.

Will the research look into the history of Indonesian revolution?

No, we have no intention to re-write the history of Indonesian revolution. In this post-Soeharto era, Indonesian historiography is being interpreted with various approaches. But we specifically only want to focus on the violent role of the Dutch soldiers during the period. Dutch historian Cees Fasseur wrote a government report in 1969 about violence committed by Dutch soldiers and sociologist J.A.A van Doorn also wrote about it in 1983. But that's it, since then there has not been any research about it.

Are you going to involve foreign (non Dutch and Indonesian) researchers to get involved in the study to help guard the objectivity?

This will be primarily a Dutch research but we certainly will ask foreign experts for advice and look for an ongoing dialogue with Indonesian colleagues.

Are some people not voicing concern over further claims similar to Rawagede? How would you deal with that?

Another lawsuit over what happened in the Celebes with regard to the brutal killing committed by Westerling is already underway. The Rawagade lawsuit has been successful and it is good that the Dutch government gave in and gave the compensation to the survivors, who were only a few because most of them have passed away due to their age. The people in Rawagede appreciated



that the Dutch government admitted the mistake and offered an apology. That is more important than money.

What was the reaction from the Dutch public and veterans? Did you find support from both the Dutch government and the parliament?

Generally positive. We have also been lobbying people in the government and the parliament. However, we only have a caretaker government now, but we have received official support from some Dutch political parties: PvdA (Labor Party), SP (Socialist Party) and GL (Green Left). There is resistance from SGP (Reformed Political Party)—a fundamentalist Christian political party—which argues that we already have had enough research about this history. PVV (Party for Freedom, which is led by Geert Wilders who has Dutch-Indonesian decent) expressed no interests.

Can you explain the approaches of the study?

First, we will go to the existing literature. Second, we will delve

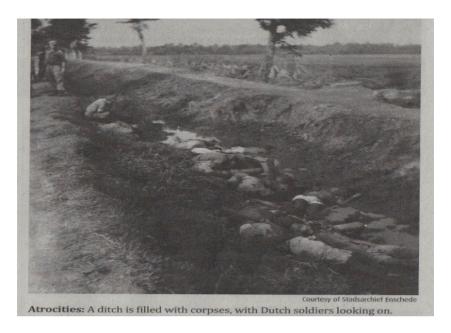
into the archives that haven not been developed. We have experts here like Harry A. Poeze who was able to trace the life of neglected Indonesian national hero Tan Malaka. We will need his expertise, for example, to investigate where and when this execution taking place (showing the shocking picture and news of the execution of Indonesians committed by Dutch soldiers in de Volksraant July 10). Third, we will go into private collections to find more pictures like this. My hunch is that this kind of violence is an everyday feature during the war. This is also important to trace the mechanism behind this collective silence. Fourth, although very late, we will also try to find and talk to the survivors.

In 2010, a conference held by Indonesian Student Association and other organizations in Leiden resulted in a recommendation to produce a history school book regarding the events of 1945-49. It is said that the book should contain human interest stories of both Indonesian and Dutch war veterans to reduce the sensitivity and highlight human aspects of both sides, but still enable us to look into and learn from each other version of history. What do you think?

Good idea. At Dutch schools, although World War II was discussed, the history of Dutch colonialism was only a tiny part and its atrocity was non-existent. I believe there must have been a deliberate effort on the part of the Dutch government to suppress this. But the use of this kind of book will also depend on the teachers if it is only a supplementary teaching material. It would be great if the book can be integrated into the main curriculum.

What is the biggest obstacle you anticipate in doing the research? Have you applied for the funding?

The biggest obstacle is if nobody has the courage to support the proposal. No, we have not applied for the funding. We have initiated this public debate through print media and it should be up to the government and the parliament to make a political



decision on this matter. We have been lobbying and we have enough support from political parties in the Dutch parliament, but we have to wait until the upcoming election in September.

What is the worst case, best case?

Worst case, nobody will agree to this proposal. Best case, we will have much better overall insight about the nature of the Dutch military operation in Indonesia during the period of Indonesia's revolution.

Read also an article written by Lina Sidarto "War Revisited" from the same newspaper:

http://www2.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/10/10/war-revisited.html *Visit also a special website about this planned research (in Dutch)*: http://www.indonesie45-50.nl/8/Instituten. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, October 10 2012

EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Promoting Pluralism Through Education

s a highly diverse Indonesia embraces democracy, it is intriguing to reflect on how the country now deals with pluralism. One may have wondered why prejudice, self-righteousness, discrimination, as well as religious and ethnic conflicts erupted under the newly democratic Indonesia, compared to the relative calm during the New Order regime.

The "success" of the New Order regime in "minimizing" religious and ethnic conflicts was mainly due to the government's absolute control in almost all of society. At all levels, the government had effective arms that would act preemptively before any conflicts broke out. Furthermore, the media was tightly controlled and it became taboo to discus inter-communal differences (known by an Indonesian acronym of "SARA", or ethnicity, religion, race and class). This contributed to a seemingly harmonious society. Nonetheless, discrimination (both overt and covert) was pervasive, such as the alienation of a particular belief and prevention of certain ethnic groups to fully participate as decent citizens.

To have in-depth results, education was used as a tool to minimize perceived differences and force people to conform to a "uniform" thought process, although the rhetoric was full of commitment to pluralism. In fact, as Bjork implied (2003), Indonesia's school system provides a huge number of teachers and students for the government to indoctrinate a large, incarcerated audience, with almost no choice but to "swallow" the regime's ideology.

The above enforcement to make people live "peacefully" with each other will only work under an authoritarian government. In a democratic society, people accept others' differences because of their voluntary willingness and conscience. The "big bang" change from long-time authoritarianism to democracy, however, provides insufficient spheres for people to adapt themselves to the new atmosphere. Decades of superficial harmony left people with "cultural shock". Many long sidelined groups, such as extremist religious groups, emerged and, ironically, received a prominent spotlight in public, most of whom appeared to be frustrated with the slow pace of reformasi.

Nevertheless, one strategic factor that transcends any system of government to "control" society is education. Under an authoritarian regime, education was strongly manipulated to spread the regime's propaganda. Under a democratic regime, education too can be effectively used to promote genuine pluralism, albeit in a different atmosphere. The strategic utilization of education is due to the fact that education functions as an agent of change within society. Moreover, schools are places where students learn to socially construct realities of the surrounding society where they live in. In this case, there are several points to be considered.

First, teachers play significant roles in promoting pluralism in class that all citizens should adhere to democratic principles: Liberty, justice, equality, and tolerance. In this case, teachers, instead of "teaching" bhinneka tunggal ika (unity in diversity) by rote memorization, should internalize and implement the motto into their own behavior in classes. Teachers should set examples, by showing that they do not favor a certain ethnic or religious group at the expense of others. Without undermining local identity, teachers should give students a proper understanding of the diverse society that in which they live.

This means that teachers can tactfully discuss what has long been regarded as taboo (SARA issues) in a critical but responsible manner, for example, by giving discussion topics to students about the social benefits of living harmoniously and the disastrous impacts of religious conflicts and discrimination. Technical discussions of how to settle the problems may not emerge, but teachers can substantially impart many positive values, such as that of respecting others' beliefs. This can be a starting point of further substantive efforts such as inter-faith dialogs. Teachers should also address the perception that the majority groups have of their "right" to superiority over minority groups, and stress that it has no place in a democratic society. The relatively small groups of people who noisily claim to be the majority's representative does not help encourage sincere dialogs among societal groups.

Second, over the past three decades, teachers behaved as a source of knowledge "who know everything" and whose instructions cannot be "challenged" by students. Now, however, teachers' roles should change to become more like facilitators and should treat students more as "friends". Without jeopardizing the authority of teachers, egalitarianism should be nurtured as part of learning process.

Third, the values of pluralism should be contained in every lesson, besides being emphasized in one particular lesson, highlighting the significance of multi-cultural curricula. For example, the similarities, rather than differences in religions, should be contextually addressed. In a broader context, as Giroux (2001) points out, "schools have a responsibility to equip students with the knowledge and skills they will need to develop critical understanding of themselves as well as what it means to live in a democratic society."

Fourth, teachers and parents should collaborate to lay out a common perception of how to teach their students and children how to live in a pluralistic society. School Committees are appropriate bodies where teachers and parents can discuss the issue, provided that School Committees are democratic school institutions where differences of opinion is highly appreciated and parent representatives are truly diverse.

Lastly, as social construction also occurs at home and in the

neighborhood, the role of parents is imperative. Parents can set examples by living harmoniously with, for example, neighbors whose religion or ethnicity is different. Nevertheless, as many teachers or parents might still adhere to the perception and practice of the old paradigm, the campaign to promote pluralism through education should be an unremitting effort for all responsible citizens. The state, in this regard, should strongly promote such a campaign by abolishing any regulations that are deemed to be anti-pluralism. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, December 16, 2004

Muhammadiyah Needs to Focus on Social Concerns

uring one sermon, the founder of Muhammadiyah, Ahmad Dahlan, elaborated on the Koranic chapter of al-Ma'un (concerning moral decay and lack of care for others), which, to the bewilderment of the audience, had been repeated during several sermons.

"Why are you repeating this?" asked one man in the audience.

"Do you really understood this chapter?" asked Ahmad Dahlan. "Yes, Kyai."

"Have you practiced it?"

"Yes, Kyai, every time we pray."

"That means you haven't practiced it in everyday life," Ahmad Dahlan admonished, while urging the audience to look around them for the very poor, take them home, give them decent clothes, food, and a room to stay.

The modest, but powerful responsibility greatly inspired some Muhammadiyah members to reach out to society and meet needs, which was later developed on a large scale—covering schools, orphanages and hospitals. Not only that, the organization set up the distribution of zakat (the obligatory tax that Muslim must give), which was vital for the poverty eradication at that time. Furthermore, societies were advised to depart from irrational practices such as visiting tombs to ask for blessing, and to deconstruct people's extreme idolization of spiritual leaders. Islamic scholars were not part of the official government bureaucracy, but still secured prominent positions within societies.

With the spirit of Islam, Muhammadiyah schools tactfully adopted modern curricula, proved to have significantly contributed to the empowerment of people, who had been grossly marginalized both socially and economically during Dutch colonial rule. At a time when patriarchy was so pervasive, Muhammadiyah decisively addressed gender issues by establishing the autonomous Nasyi'atul Aisyiyah.

Steadily, Muhammadiyah alumni took over public positions such as physicians, teachers, bureaucrats and village chiefs, which had previously been dominated by Dutch-educated people. Its educational activities significantly functioned as agents of social change within societies.

Furthermore, Muhammadiyah promoted democratic values by emphasizing collective leadership, not individual, and pushing for egalitarian discussions on social issues.

Likewise, Ahmad Dahlan was successful in spreading the tolerant side of Islam by displaying humility and nurturing warm relationships with leaders of Christian missionary groups in Yogyakarta, such as Reverend Baker and others.

This was clear evidence of Ahmad Dahlan's commitment to building a pluralistic society.

At present, Muhammadiyah has evolved into the second largest Muslim organization in Indonesia with a huge number of universities, schools, orphanages and hospitals spread throughout the archipelago. Its grassroots members and alumni have spread out and become prominent and active in both government and non-governmental organizations.

Such a historical perspective makes it clear that Muhammadiyah was never established to be directly "involved" in real politics, was not, until the collapse of the Soeharto regime in 1998. During the euphoria of that time, its outspoken leader—who was also a prominent reformasi figure—Amien Rais, established a "Muhammadiyah political party" called the National Mandate Party (PAN), which was formally based on a pluralistic platform.

Although it is not structurally under Muhammadiyah, the party became a political vehicle for Muhammadiyah's members

to channel their political ambitions. Regrettably, Amien Rais never succeeded in becoming the country's president. Later, Muhammadiyah members became disappointed as many non-members of Muhammadiyah used PAN to advance their political aspirations. Worse still, PAN was attacked from many sides for having an ambiguous ideology—secularists accused PAN of being too religious, while Islamists said too secular.

There are therefore several points to be considered. First, the "political failure" of Muhammadiyah proved that Muhammadiyah is not a political mass organization where the political leaders could sway the members to blindly follow them. It is the result of decades of educational activities where irrational worship towards spiritual leaders had been deconstructed and replaced by a rational way of thinking. The enlightened middle classes who were socially active in muamalah tradition proved to be more "social capital", rather than "political capital".

Second, it is also the nature of Muhammadiyah, whose members have also become active in other societal or political organizations. Uniting them in one political party proved to be unsuccessful and instead weakened the powerful benefits of spreading its members into other societal groups. Indeed, before and right after independence, many Muhammadiyah figures had been politically active, but their relationships were based more on middle-class networks—traders or government bureaucrats.

Third, a political party can gradually undermine the social nature of the organization. During the heyday of PAN, for example, many academics from Muhammadiyah universities "abandoned" teaching and joined the party to become politicians and inevitably got involved in "cheap" power struggles among fellow members. If this trend continues, it could eventually annihilate the educational nature of the organization.

Fourth, as there are always ongoing debates in any organization, a political party can instead polarize Muhammadiyah members. Some might manipulate the debates to amplify their political

standing in public, dashing the hopes to have justifiable solutions. For example, the recent showdown between the "puritans" and "inclusivists/liberals" can be unnecessarily dragged into the political arena and threaten the cohesion of the organization.

In conclusion, small sections within Muhammadiyah, who were so "hungry" to form a new political party after being disappointed with PAN, should think seriously before implementing the idea. History tells us that Muhammadiyah was able to evolve into a commanding organization only when it distanced itself from practical politics. The noble agendas laid down by Ahmad Dahlan of enhancing social empowerment through education and promoting democratic virtues of tolerance, pluralism and egalitarianism might never be achieved if politics is mixed in. In the long run, making Muhammadiyah more socially inclusive, not politically exclusive, is far more beneficial. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, January 5, 2005

Education after Catastrophe

ontemplating the magnitude of the catastrophe, it is clear that education is a key factor in enabling the Acehnese to rebuild their lives. Rebuilding education in the devastated province is one of the most urgent tasks for the government.

Its positive long-lasting impacts cannot be guaranteed, but it is because of this long-term issue that people's and the government's commitment needs to be tested. Short-term goals may appear pertinent and seem to be more crucial, but long-term goals are equally as important.

It should be borne in mind that the disappearance of about 1,000 teachers, and the fact that 50 percent of school buildings were crushed by the earthquake-triggered tsunamis, was also a massive "mental quake" for the Acehnese students. Around 140,000 elementary school students and 20,000 junior high school students have been left stranded, with no school buildings in which to study. We should remember, however, that even before the natural disaster, education in Aceh had suffered much from the prolonged war between the Indonesian Military (TNI) and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM).

Many of the youths are still trying to cope with the bitter reality that their beloved classmates—with whom they used to sit, play, "fight", study or share student jokes with—are dead. It is, therefore, crucial that we help bring back the students' confidence.

It is encouraging that people have begun to switch from donating secondhand clothes and dry food to other things, such as books, pencils and pens. Therapy-like education has slowly been introduced, while volunteer teachers of many religious and social organizations are streaming into the province.

While mosques are widely used as emergency schools—also offering religious guidance—other emergency school buildings are being erected. Also, several school buildings that remained intact were cleared of refugees so that classes could be held there.

These efforts, however, are insufficient and more needs to be done accordingly.

First, it should be realized that the province was not only devastated by a colossal calamity, but has also been a war-zone for decades. The recent restriction imposed on foreign volunteers, while understandable as far as "sensitivity" and "security" issues are concerned, is still regrettable as it could hinder the reconstruction process.

In this case, priority should be given to volunteers who are willing to work in rebuilding the education system—be they national or international volunteers.

Because of these restrictions, however, national teacher volunteers should be given wider access to more volatile areas that have been closed to international volunteers. Alternatively, international volunteers could be accompanied by officials or local non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives.

This requires not just good coordination, but awareness from all sides of the significance of providing decent education for Acehnese students.

Second, education under these circumstances will require more patience than in normal times. As many national volunteers are university students with more physical energy than most teachers, it is hoped that they can conduct their mission with vigor.

Likewise, counseling, for example, might be better conducted by university students, especially from the schools of education or psychology, who can act as "brothers and sisters" to the Acehnese students.

Third, volunteer teachers should also act as role models for the disturbed Acehnese students.

Fourth, the tragedy and education reconstruction efforts

could be a moment of truth that becomes the foundation for the rebuilding of Acehnese society. At the same time, people in the troubled province could be more convinced that they are an integral part of Indonesia.

The fact is that many Indonesians, irrespective of their ethnicity and religion, volunteered or donated funds to the province in a national show of solidarity and compassion for the Acehnese.

Through education reconstruction efforts, the sincerity and warmth of their brothers and sisters across the archipelago, as well as the empathy shown by the international community, may become lasting memories for the younger generation of the Acehnese.

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Sex Education, Religious and Cultural Values

his newspaper (Jan. 27) reported an alarming result of a survey concerning premarital sex among youngsters in four big cities—Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan and Bandung. The research found that 40 percent of 237 sexually active youngsters who responded to the survey lost their virginity at home, 26 percent at a boarding house and 26 percent in a hotel.

Although 80 percent of total respondents (475) agreed that premarital sex was against their religions values, some still had sex.

Some nagging questions might be raised: Will we, as a nation, be able to advance our knowledge, skills and intellectual capacity, while simultaneously preserving our values and being selective in absorbing "foreign" values? What is the role of education here?

Alas! The study unveiled that only 5 percent of respondents learned about sexuality from schools, while others learned from friends and pornographic materials. This fact shows that there is a pressing need to include sex education in school curriculums to minimize the risks of irresponsible sexual activities and to counter the misguided information the students receive from other sources.

Unfortunately, efforts to include sex education at schools seem to have always hit the wall as a conservative way of thinking still lingers in our conscience. Interestingly, not only in our country, Western countries also encountered similar obstacles. Just recently the Sunday Herald (Jan. 23, 2005) reported that in Scotland "the Catholic Church claimed victory in the ongoing row over sexual health education in schools after insisting that head teachers would be able to block family planning workers from entering classrooms".

Even in the U.S., as Denis L. Carlson (1992) elaborates, there are four influential ideologies that have shaped the thinking of sex education: traditionalist, progressive, radical Freudian and libertarian ideologies. The traditionalists strictly separate mind from body; the mind is to preserve the holiness, while the body tends to corrupt. It adheres to traditional Judeo-Christian teachings that curse adultery, sodomy and homosexuality. Progressives claim to be modern, although still refer to traditional ideologies. However, they subscribe to less reproachful and more healing approaches.

Radical Freudian ideology believes that "sexuality had to become less repressed and more egalitarian", in which homosexuality is somewhat understood. Finally, libertarian ideology "rejects a narrow view that understands sexuality primarily in terms of 'normality' and champions for individual sexual rights".

While many would hope that our country would not embrace the last two ideologies, the combination of the first two somehow reflects the competing forces in our thinking of sexuality. Already we can see how religious (mainly derived from the interpretation of Islam) and cultural values (often dubbed budaya timur, or eastern culture) have penetrated into all spheres of our life.

Simultaneously, we can see how "secular" or perhaps "modern" ideology is also competing to influence the way we perceive sexuality, such as the much-debated "safe sex" campaign in the media. Sex education is unfortunately something that is inevitable.

But how do we pursue sex education? Certainly, a scientific explanation of biological aspects of human sexuality and reproduction can serve as an effective foundation, as biology is taught at schools. However, in a country where religiosity has deep roots, this is not enough. An appreciation of religious values should be imparted to make students aware of how great God is in creating this marvelous system of reproduction.

Some argue that sex education should be a single isolated subject; some say inserting sexuality in pertinent subjects could be more profoundly affecting. Some experts argue that the younger the better for students.

At the elementary school level, for example, a simple picture of a pregnant mother might be useful to explain about where "we are all from". At higher levels, issues of sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, abortion, teenage pregnancy and single parents can be discussed and the social consequences and wide-ranging perspectives can be explored in a candid manner.

To Muslim students, for example, a basic understanding of the fiqh regarding the relationship between husband and wife and its sexually related issues might also be introduced.

These issues need to be thoroughly debated by educators and scholars of all faiths. Nevertheless, getting a common understanding might be problematic unless all parties "take off their jackets" and faithfully make the interests of our young generation the top priority.

Therefore, the political will of the government is still needed to facilitate the push toward sex education in formal education, as well as the collective will of civil society to urge the media to touch on sexuality in a more educational but religiously sensitive way.

The harder we suppress sexuality, the more eager youngsters are to explore sexuality in their own way. Unless we candidly embrace their curiosity in a pedagogically responsible manner, our youngsters may depart from our values and subscribe to their own "wild" interpretation of sexuality. •

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Detaching Ourselves from The Culture of Violence

rom the pre-independence to post-Soeharto eras, violence has marred the history of this nation, perhaps prompting some to ask: Are we born violent? It would be shameful to answer "yes", but we might also argue that violence occurs everywhere in the world. Jawahar L. Nehru once bitterly admitted, "Violence has played a great part in the world's history".

However, although violence is not exclusively ours, it cannot be denied that violence has been constantly disturbing the life of this nation. Examples abound, from the burning of a petty thief by an angry mob to religious and ethnic conflicts in some parts of the country. Such violence occurred because certain conditions had not been met, such as decisive law enforcement and a resolute end to discrimination. According to sociologist Joel M. Charon (1992), "Violent action...is often caused by relative deprivation. Groups in society compare what they have to what they expect, and where their expectations are not met, violent collective behavior is encouraged."

Nevertheless, Charon also argues that "violence should not be seen simply as irrational frustrated action." For example, at one junction of the nation's history, the concept of violence had been transformed into the power of words, which might have passionately inspired people to pursue violence. Mochtar Lubis (1980), one of the greatest journalists this country has, in his book Catatan Subversif, quotes a poem written by a communist poet in March 1965 but published in one newspaper on Dec. 5, 1965: "What is the use of having many (military) generals if peasants have no security? People...get ready... take (the generals) to their graves!"

But violence breeds violence. After the mysterious murder of the generals blamed on the communists, reprisal was recorded by historians as even more vicious with millions of PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) members or sympathizers brutally murdered. No trials, no accountability, but life went on as if the large-scale massacres had been trivial.

This means violence is not only caused by frustration, but may also be socially engineered to reach specific goals such as ideological or religious fanaticism. Unfortunately, we have never had truly national leaders who consistently promote peaceful means such as Mahatma Gandhi of India.

We, conversely, have both political and spiritual leaders who seem to have let violence take its course as a "normal" feature of our lives. During the New Order regime, mass violence was suppressed, ironically by violently repressing individual liberty. After the collapse of the New Order regime, mass violence sanctioned by lack of tolerance and a feeling of majority-superiority erupted amid a euphoric atmosphere.

After the euphoria died down, however, the violence reemerged taking new forms. The suspected political assassination of rights activist Munir, the beating of military-critic Farid Faqih, and the alleged shooting of a bartender by tycoon Adiguna Sutowo illustrated a new face of violence that is steadily taking root under this new democracy. The trend is disturbing, particularly if the powerful might increasingly perceive this violence as a "practical" way to tackle their power-related problems.

Nevertheless, there is another "new" form of violence that has barely been detected: "Media violence" and its profound influence on our youngsters. Kevin Browne and Catherine Hamilton-Giachritsis of the England's University of Birmingham have recently reported their research findings that "the likelihood of aggressive or fearful behavior in younger children, especially boys," has been evidently enhanced through violent imagery in TV, movies and videos and computer games.

Likewise, several other studies showed that those who were exposed to violent programs were increasingly reluctant to mediate or to call for assistance when faced with a group of people fighting.

In another aspect, this has arguably resulted in increased youngsters' hostile aggressiveness, manifested such as in bullying and student brawls. And in our country, particularly in big cities, student brawls have tragically cost many lives and caused injuries.

This hostile violence, which seems aimed purely at hurting others, is equally dangerous to previous forms that had been caused by frustration or orchestrated with specific goals in mind. It is horrendous to imagine this hostile violence of our youngsters gradually developing into a component of our social structure.

So, we are probably not born violent, but learn to be violent. From the top level of society (the state) to the very bottom (families), violence is cultivated.

This nation may never be able to detach itself from the culture of violence when the spirit of impunity is still attached to the apparatus, where law enforcement is toothless when facing the "haves", where discrimination exists among certain people and where our youngsters are encouraged to view violent behavior.

All segments of society, therefore, need to take responsibility for breaking this circle of violence.

For the authorities, upholding law enforcement and respecting human rights, demanding social equality and ending discrimination once and for all are among the most pressing issues.

For parents, scrutinizing TV violence and cautiously but critically discussing its social costs and realities with their children is necessary, but stations should also consider reviewing their program selection criteria.

This is, after all, no light matter; we cannot afford to let violence develop into an accepted form of conflict resolution. •

Tug of War between Government and Public Over National Examinations

he plan to institute National Final Examinations has drawn criticism from many education observers who are baffled as to why the central government is insisting on them while at the same time an independent national body to implement standardization has yet been established.

The national examinations are also perceived to be against the National Education System Law (No. 20/2003), which sets out the rights of teachers to evaluate their students. Many also accuse the central government of trying to impose recentralizion by the back door—something that would clearly be inconsistent with the spirit of decentralization as part of which local authorities have been given substantial powers over education under Law No. 22/1999. Worse still, only three subjects will be examined—Bahasa Indonesia, English and Mathematics, and the examinations are to be in multiple choice rather than essay format, prompting fears that the new tests will fail to measure students' real cognitive abilities.

The central government, backed mostly by its own surveys and studies, argues that the national examinations are needed for the sake of standardization, even during the transition period until such time as the regulations on national education standardization have been finalized.

Consequently, there is apprehension that schools will have to provide extra tutoring for students merely for the sake of passing the tests, while other schools might upgrade their students' performance for the sake of maintaining or polishing up the school's image.

There is not doubt that we need a standardized system that is capable of ensuring quality education. However, all the stakeholders, such as teachers, parents and educationalists, should be extensively consulted. Local participation should not be damaged by the desire to "standardize". Democracy cannot not be put back in the box as it has already penetrated into all fields of life. The government cannot just ignore what has been agreed with the stakeholders.

What is clear, however, is the fact that the central government is becoming increasingly reluctant to devolve its powers to the local level. There is a tug of war underway involving the stakeholders—particularly between the central government and local government—regarding the implementation of decentralization in education. The center wants to get its powers back, while the local governments want more powers. A perusal of the literature on decentralization around the world reveals that this kind of chaotic situation has arisen in many countries and is, actually, quite predictable.

For example, Hans Weiller (1990) in his classic arguments regarding "compensatory legitimation" implies that education decentralization is mainly motivated by the need to reinforce the legitimacy of the central authority. In the light of the failure of centralized education systems and the popularity of the notion of increased local participation, a move to devolve powers to the local level is normally popular and serves as effective insulation amidst conflictual circumstances.

What normally happens then is that the central government finds that it has lost too much power. At the same time, legitimacy is eroded as many shortcomings became apparent after the dust of euphoria has settled. As Weiller argues, the central authorities might be prompted to conduct an evaluation of what has been done so as to ascertain whether things such as a "certain degree of homogeneity" are still intact. Sections within the center, whose power was severely curtailed by decentralization, might be eager

to use this opportunity to resurrect their lost "glory days".

All of this only serves to confirm that education is always closely linked to politics. E. B. Fiske (1996) describes the political aspects of education as follows: "Embodiments of national values"; "a source of political power"; "vehicle for exercising power"; and "political weapons". This country serves as an excellent example of a place where education has always been politically misused from supporting autocratic regimes to serving as a cash cow for bureaucrats through their participation in lucrative projects.

Is it possible for us to restrain ourselves from abusing education and for once to put the interests of our young people first? Is it possible that we could treat education in a more civilized manner? As long as power is involved, however, it would seem that the answers to both these questions is "No". So who else can save our education system given that the bureaucrats are so preoccupied with amassing more power for themselves and competing to win lucrative projects, while ignoring the pedagogical aspects?

We might be skeptical, but we do not need to give up hope entirely. There is still a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. For example, the fact that we triumphed in International Science Olympiads abroad at least proves that we have not lost a generation despite the prolonged political misuse and abuse of our education system. All we can do is to nurture the students that show potential and encourage others to follow suit by affording as many educational opportunities for them as possible.

Given that our trust in the government has reached such a low ebb, it is timely for every responsible parent to begin seriously exploring and identifying the talents possessed by their children and to guide them in a proper, pedagogical way. Carefully selected formal and non-formal education, for example, can be constructive for the development of our children—development that covers not only the cognitive but also the affective and psychomotoric aspects.

This spirit should be initiated and continuously nurtured at home, and could in the long run turn out to be far more successful

than the instrumentalist approaches pursued by the state, which have always been contaminated with hefty doses of political trial and error. •

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Teaching Human Rights at Schools?

uring my time as a teacher at some non-formal education institutions, I found the students to be relaxed in their expression of ideas. Jokes that mocked the New Order regime were carefully timed during discussions, making us chuckle. At public schools, however, students were generally tense. Jokes were told, but naturally not about the New Order regime.

When I touched on the issues of human rights, students showed interest. But there was no student who raised questions.

Lessons on human rights can be stimulating for students, but which method of teaching works best?

In light of the fact that the world has been rocked by terrorism—which disgraces human dignity through its violent acts and the prejudice and discrimination that it incites—this is a critical question. While democratic values are now being adopted here, human rights violations continue in various new forms.

Indeed, there are now many school textbooks that cover human rights issues, but teachers lack the experience to teach human rights values to students according to their stage of development, which is pedagogically essential to effectively impart the values to students.

Betty A. Reardon in her book Educating for Human Dignity: Learning about Rights and Responsibilities, outlines practical educational activities to be practiced in classrooms based on the developmental level of elementary and secondary school students.

For childhood level (ages five to eight), the main concepts and values are rules, order, respect, fairness, diversity, cooperation and personal responsibility; and the discussion topics are inequality, unfairness and harm.

At this stage, the concepts of social order, fairness, community and responsibility are introduced through the practicality of classroom rules. It should be imparted that observing agreed rules is important so that everybody can have opportunities to engage in all learning activities. In terms of diversity, students are exposed to the notion that the beauty of the whole family is characterized by the willingness of its members to recognize their differences.

For later childhood (ages nine to 11), the main concepts and values are law, citizenship, community rights, constitution, freedom, social responsibility; the discussion topics are prejudice, discrimination, poverty and injustice. At this stage, the teacher introduces the idea that a citizen has both rights and responsibilities, thus introducing the basic concept of citizenship.

In classrooms, through drama or puppetry, a scene can be shown where a child is denied participation in class activities due to specific reasons, followed by discussion on how prejudice and discrimination can hamper people's right to receive a decent education.

For adolescents (ages 12 to 14), the main concepts and values are justice, equality, equity, global responsibility and international law; while the discussion topics are ethnocentrism, racism and authoritarianism.

In classrooms, teacher can ask students to list things that can make the world better and compile human rights news and stories from the media that reflect their wishes, such as the change from authoritarianism to democracy in some countries.

For youths (ages 15 to 17), the main concepts and values are moral exclusion and inclusion, moral responsibility, global citizenship and ecological responsibility; the discussion topics are ethnocide, genocide, torture, political repression and environmental abuse.

For example, students can be encouraged to get involved in a movement that pushes the government to outline new regulations that preserve the right to a sustainable environment. Their involvement in such activities can be stimulating as it enhances both their organizational skills and their human rights awareness.

Above all, if we are serious about making this nation more peaceful, civilized and democratic of its own accord, it is vital for the government—with the help of any concerned non-government organization—to start institutionalizing both the conceptual awareness and practical skills of human rights education through capacity building such as the training of teachers and workshops. Locally rooted educational activities, however, should further be designated, encouraging the emergence of a genuine awareness.

Unlike during the New Order regime, now we have the opportunity to make this happen. The question is: Do we have the commitment and will to pursue this? •

First published by The Jakarta Post, May 2, 2005

Decentralization of Education Often Misinterpreted

n his article published on The Jakarta Post on April 16, Mateus Yumarmanto raised concern that the government had adopted an approach that groups schoolchildren according to their intellectual abilities and the financial capacity of their parents.

According to him, this is against the principle that the competency of all students should meet minimum national standards. Second, according to the writer, this is also against the policy of a nine-year compulsory education, which implies that the government should provide basic education for all children regardless of their intellectual and financial levels.

Education minister Bambang Sudibyo said this was not yet policy, but merely an "internal discourse" that had leaked out to the public.He said the government would consistently stick to Education Law 20/2003, which divides the path into formal, nonformal and informal education.

However, the draft of the education ministry's Strategic Plan for 2005-2009 and the would-be government regulation state that formal education would further be divided into mandiri (independence) and standar (standard). The mandiri is for students who have high intellectual ability and come from financially sound families, while the standar is for students with less intellectual capacity and who come from less financially sound families.

Certainly, these categorizations could be insulting for some. Who wants to be labeled "poor" or "stupid"? Besides, these categorizations are too simplistic. How about those intelligent students who come from poor families, and those students who are not so academically gifted but come from wealthier families?

I would argue that this is all due to the "excessive" misinterpretation of the principles of education decentralization.

As the collapse of the New Order regime also brought down with it the highly centralized education system, a decentralized education system was introduced. Karslen (2000) and McGinn and Wells (1999) outline the advantages of education decentralization, such as releasing the central authority from a s financial burden and increasing local participation.

Unfortunately, this has further been interpreted as releasing the central authority from its "total" financial burden and "total" local participation. As a result, families are now bearing the main responsible for their children's education, particularly with regard to the financial aspects. Simultaneously, the government is gradually "washing its hands" of education by shifting its responsibilities into the hands of parents.

If this trend continues, a segregated society is inevitable. During my research fieldwork, some rich parents whose children were studying at a successful and "rich" school already held the view that a segregated society was somehow "acceptable".

How can you expect my children to be sent to a low-quality school when I have enough money to send her to this school? Less financially capable parents whose children were studying at less successful and "poorer" school said, "We have no choice although my son is smart enough!"

Their arguments are logical, but given the fact that decentralization is linked to "marketization" in which schools are increasingly competing against one another despite their differing conditions, this trend, if unchecked, might lead to a widening gap between "rich" and "poor" schools and further divide society.

This is perhaps what pushed the government to simplistically divide formal education into mandiri and standar classes, thus "legitimizing" the increasingly segregated society and dangerously encouraging discrimination.

One can learn from Chile and Spain, which decentralized

their education systems while moving from authoritarianism to democracy. Much of Chile's success reflects an effective arrangement of state and private forces, in which the ministry of education plays a strong role in protecting the vulnerable and assuring quality.

Indeed, increased competition among schools will encourage quality education, and increased local participation will enhance people's awareness of education. But this does not mean the government should abdicate its responsibilities and let the competition segregate society, let alone structurally place the poor, both "financially and intellectually", into a separate assembly line!

A quasi-market approach has therefore been proposed to combine both market and bureaucratic procedures in which the government should act as a wise mediator to ensure that the force of marketization will not devour the poor. While letting the people decide what level of education is best for them, the government should somehow facilitate the process without forcing people to be grouped into "special classes".

One way to achieve this is by ensuring that the plan to utilize the money saved from the slashed fuel subsidy to provide free education within the framework of a nine-year compulsory education is fully endorsed and implemented. Regardless of their differing backgrounds, let all students compete and strive for excellence! •

First published by The Jakarta Post, May 8, 2005

Nurlaila, an Example of Abuse against Teachers

ne leading national newspaper reported not long ago that some teachers and students filed a judicial review of Law No. 20/2003 on national education. They argued that basic education should be extended from elementary school to high school. They also insisted that the gradual phasing in of the 20 percent national budget allocation for education as required by the law was hampering the realization of free education for all. They appeared to press for the "now-or-never" implementation of the budget allocation.

In another case, Nurlaila, a teacher at SMP 56 junior high school in Jakarta, together with parents, students and other teachers, led a protest against a land-swap deal between the Ministry of National Education and PT Tata Disantara. The protesters claimed this deal, which led to the closure of the school, was riddled with irregularities (The Jakarta Post, May 12, 2005).

I also encountered during my research, we have witnessed the mushrooming of non-governmental organizations founded by teachers and educators that are often critical of the government's education policies.

Whether or not they provide well-reasoned arguments for their criticism is another story. What is important here is Christopher Bjork's (2003) research indicating that the role of teachers in Indonesia as mere "transmitters" of knowledge has gradually begun to break down. Teachers' awareness of their social role has not only emerged, but has also begun to be put into action as "teacher activism".

There are some points worth considering here.

First, teachers are increasingly aware that they can be a force to

be reckoned with and that education can function as an influential agent of social change. The old paradigm that schools are merely instructional sites and that education is and should be separated from sociopolitical aspects has steadily vanished.

Second, the challenge derives from the fact that schools represent arenas of contest and struggle among differentially empowered cultural and economic groups. Teachers are under pressure to generate and accommodate various competing aspirations within society, meaning equal treatment in the form of the involvement of students and parents regardless of their background is imperative in giving weight to the credibility of their movement.

Third, teachers should further use this opportunity to inject this new spirit in students. Involving students in the judicial process of the education law must have been a stimulating experiment, indeed, but this should also be accompanied by nurturing this spirit in a more pedagogically responsible manner in class.

After declaring themselves "new democrats", teachers' democratic values should be reflected when teaching and dealing with students.

Fourth, teachers' organizations must be "immune" from any vested interests and must be able—together with concerned lawmakers—to effectively balance and apply pressure on the government. The idea that non-governmental organizations often end up being subjected to vested interests is still widespread in this country.

During my fieldwork, for example, I encountered two new teachers' organizations that had splintered off from the oncegovernment supported Indonesian Teachers Union (PGRI). One of them vanished in about a year due to a dispute among its members. The remaining organization grouped private teachers who were disappointed with the PGRI, which was dominated by government teachers. However, just before I finished my fieldwork, the chairman of the organization ran for the local legislature as a member of the then ruling political party.

Another teacher activist from the private sector successfully became chairman of the education board in Jakarta, but the supposedly independent body was never effective because its members from the private and government factions became entangled in a dispute over the members' election results.

Teacher activism therefore strongly demands idealism on the part of teachers in avoiding short-term political gains and in resisting political pressure. But can teachers consistently uphold such idealism amid their below-standard pay and professionalism and the lure of and pressure from political power?

One may doubt it. But among the cases I observed, only SMP 56 is different, with Nurlaila left alone fighting for justice as parents and other teachers compromised and accepted the closure of the school. Nurlaila was fired, losing her position as a civil servant, and is now suing Jakarta Governor Sutiyoso for her dismissal. The land-swap deal itself is now before the Supreme Court as both the South Jakarta District Court and a higher court threw out a civil suit against the Ministry of National Education and the private company involved in the deal (The Jakarta Post, May 12, 2005).

But how many Nurlailas do we have? Certainly not many. As the aforementioned cases show, while being critical over education policy is undeniably needed because our education system is still dogged with entrenched problems, it is also equally important that teachers critically reflect on what has been achieved, assist each other in enhancing professional development, identify factual and common problems and back this up with solid arguments, and launch more organized campaigns to achieve the just and quality education system to which we all aspire.

Without this strong commitment and awareness, teacher activism may end up being hijacked by short-term interests or bending to political pressure. And more Nurlailas might end up being victimized. •

Developing Gender Equality in Indonesia through Education

espite the recently lifted beauty pageant ban slapped on our women—which prevent any from participation in the Miss Universe competition in 1996—on the grounds of "cultural, religious and sexual exploitation" reasons, gender inequality has always been ubiquitous in our society.

A feminist friend summed it up with a simple, clear sentence: "Women and men are not identical, but they are equal." The first clause shows sexuality, while the second gender awareness. "The problem is the two are intimately related," she explained. In a patriarchal society they are overlapped, resulting in social inequality. Marriage, pregnancy and menstruation, which are associated with sexuality, are regarded as "natural obstructions" that prevent women from receiving equal treatment in society.

In education, many parents have long given priority to their sons in furthering their education, not their daughters based on the argument, "Our daughters will end up cooking in the kitchen anyway."

But recent statistics from the National Education Ministry shows something encouraging: Participation at elementary school level was 96.64 percent for males and 94.34 percent for females. In junior high, the gap nearly disappears with 56.62 percent and 56.30 percent for males and females, respectively.

And, notably, female students are statistically more successful in completing each level of education. At the elementary level it is 96.18 percent and 95.88 percent; in junior high it is 93.28 percent and 90.83 percent and at high school it is 95.95 percent and 94.91 percent. For higher education it is 15.39 percent and 14.22 percent

for female and male students, respectively.

If we examine the workforce issue, however, the numbers are quite disappointing. The statistics show that females in the workforce generally receive lower incomes than their male counterparts. Another example is in civil servant recruitment, where there is a wide gulf between successful applicants—males (62.40 percent) and females (33.25 percent).

In the national political structure, women are represented by only 8 percent of their own. So it can be concluded that the output of our education system is still considered very low and a large proportion of women still do not receive proper education. This is evident as a large number of women leave their families to work as domestic helpers in foreign countries. Out of 1.95 million Indonesians working overseas, 65 percent are women.

Many of them have been treated in an inhumane manner—tortured, raped and killed—and without adequate judicial protection from our representatives. Worse still, our domestic thugs often prey on them right from their arrival at the airport. Regrettably, women—who make up a vital part of the paid Indonesian labor force—are prone to exploitation.

Furthermore, quite ironically, aside from working overseas, others are also still subjected to violence at home. Domestic violence, for example, is spiraling as result of the socially constructed patriarchal perception, which is still prevalent in our society. And it largely goes unreported, apparently due to fears of a harsher backlash. A female friend whose face was black-and-blue only dared to whisper about her ordeal to her best female friend. One study shows that marital rape and sexual assault are on the rise, which confirms men's perceived sexual entitlement.

Why does all this happen here?

Arguably, first, despite the "statistical progress" in gender equality in school participation, education remains an unattainable luxury for too many young women and girls.

Second, there is a lack of adequate education in society about

gender issues. Deep under the surface there is problem of mental awareness.

Are our schools guilty of nurturing this mental awareness? Partially yes. In addition to many families and the media, schools are responsible for inculcating the dominant values of society. Although the development of our curriculum is steadily moving toward the elimination of gender bias, gender stereotypes remain intact.

If we ask teachers most would say that they are against discrimination, but it is an open secret that social norms that continue the unequal treatment of girls and the preferential treatment of boys still prevail, though perhaps just on a subconscious level.

For example, some young women at a vocational school say that they receive covert mockery from the young men (who dominate the school), especially during metal-working classes. And the teachers ignore it. This can be perilous; particularly as we are now adopting a competence-based curriculum, for this can discourage girls from exploring and developing their genuine interests to achieve competence.

So how do we nurture gender awareness in our education system? Sex education seems to be the answer. However, if we examine the text books, most of what is termed "sex education" is science-based, which simply provides "technical" information on pregnancy, reproduction and birth.

Although one text of violence against women can be found in our new civic education, substantive discussion on values of the relationship between males and females and the subsequent social consequences are still rare. Or, if this were to be further developed by teachers, would it be possible to do effectively, amid the latent patriarchal culture and degradation of women in our society?

Despite the fact that we once had a female president, the cases above show that what my feminist friends dreamed of that "Women and men are not identical, but they are equal" is still

from a reality in our society. And schools are partly responsible for this. Decisive policies to provide more access to education for women and a pedagogical campaign for gender equality is therefore indispensable.

And perhaps Artika Sari Devi, an educated Muslim woman, can also seriously help to campaign for this "education for all women" and silence those who are cynical about her taking part in the Miss Universe competition, which is not merely about physical beauty, but also about inner beauty, intelligence, knowledge, skills, and dignity. •

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The Benefits and Pitfalls of The New Curriculum

thas been a year since the introduction of the new competence-based curriculum, but a pile of basic questions has been left poorly answered: Why a competence-based curriculum? Is it possible to pursue this while many teachers are still perceived as "incompetent"? How to validly measure competence?

First, it is important to examine the impetus that forced the government to introduce this curriculum. Some argue that the need to have quality human resources to compete in a job market was the main reason. But I agree more with Siti Wachidah (2004), an expert from the Jakarta State University (UNJ), who argues that the introduction of a competence-based curriculum was merely a "logical" consequence of the wide-sweeping political movement of decentralization, which also pushed for the implementation of school-based management.

Indonesia is currently undergoing social transformation. Since the school curriculum is interwoven with the entire cultural fabric, the adequacy of the old curriculum for the new cultural circumstances will be searchingly questioned and changes in the curriculum projected. The problem is under such unstable circumstances, fewer standards of conduct and elements of knowledge are usually adopted.

Second, it is significant to note that the nature of the competence-based curriculum is result oriented rather than process oriented. This is evident as the new national curriculum system introduces two innovations: First, focusing on standardized competence and learning output; second, decentralizing syllabus development and implementation.

This means teachers are pressed to strike a balance between "standardization" in learning output and "autonomy" in its implementation, the latter demanding creativity in exploring the supporting teaching methods. To sum up: Specific standardized achievement should be "uncompromisingly" achieved, but how to pursue this is "left" to the teachers. But what sort of standardized competence is required?

Some argue that this standardized competence needs a thorough consensus among stakeholders. Nevertheless, experts say that a competence-based system, which permits curricular diversity due to the diversity of potential of each section of education, does not necessarily need "uniformity" in curricula. But a broad consensus on curriculum development including the reference points (such as what it means by competence and the stages to achieve it), as Harries, Guthrie and Hobart (2001) argue, is still important mainly for practical consideration.

The obstacle, however, stems from the contradicting policies; a trademark of our government. The competence-based curriculum runs at odds with the national exams, which now fall under the responsibility of the newly established National Education Standardization Agency (BSNP) whose formation has been controversial, making one doubt whether it can really represent the concerned stakeholders. While the curriculum emphasizes performance standards, the centralized national exams emphasize merely standards reflecting academic content.

Thus, the recent confusion on the part of teachers is not unexpected. Reforming the national exam by turning it into an instrument to map out "national competence", not as a requirement to complete one level of education, or abolishing it and letting schools or districts conduct local exams as a measurement mechanism might be worth considering.

Likewise, the curriculum marks the shift from mass-based learning to individual-based learning, which is pedagogically laudable. But the number of students in regular classes is around 40, sometimes more. How on earth can teachers give quality attention to individuals in a class with such a high number of pupils? Virtually impossible.

Worse still, the competence of teachers to even adopt the spirit of this curriculum is sadly doubtful. Take public schools as an example. Based on teacher education background, statistics from the Ministry of National Education (2001) reveal that at the elementary school level, out of 1,040,698 teachers, 556,009 are incompetent; at the junior high school level, out of 292,835, 106,783 are incompetent, at the senior high school level, out of 109,374, 30,385 are incompetent; and at the vocational high school level, notably, out of 43,614, 30,085 are incompetent!

Other countries' experience shows that national awareness to improve their workforce was the main pressure that pressed for the implementation of a competence-based education. But Indonesia is unique, the spirit of decentralization was instead the main factor; hence, there is a legitimate concern that its relevance to what is actually needed in the job market might have also been overlooked.

We still expect that vocational education will be "whipped" to perform better than general education in terms of technical competence and for the general education not to entirely abandon its effort to sharpen students' cognitive capability. Indeed, inserting a substantial, but appropriate degree of "competence" in general education can hopefully augment student "life skills" and in due course help address unemployment.

And because we are left with almost no choice but to adopt this curriculum, we have every right to demand that the government listen to the stakeholders and pursue the policy in a consistent and concerted manner. Teacher professional development; reference points of a targeted level of competence relevant to the job market; delivery of teaching materials and resources of approaches to teaching; and measurement of competence are among the issues that need to be addressed.

Support from the grassroots level, however, is equally

important. While a local initiative to activate inter-school Teacher Study Program Discussion Forum (MGMP) to share all related teaching issues—such as teaching methods and classroom organization—is commendable, more needs to be done. Continual assistance both from local governments and industry can be useful to empower teacher professionalism and help build a more concrete bridge between education and the job market.

As with any other policy, there are always snares, short routes, shallow implementation, and overemphasis on one aspect at the cost of others. Let's hope this will not end up merely as another band-aid solution to the acutely ingrained problems of our education system. •

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How Education Can Create a Spirit of Pluralism

of attacks that rocked the country recently is evidence enough our society has not been able to fully escape from a culture of violence and division. Suspicion, hatred, and prejudice, it seems, still run deep in many communities, exploding with the spark created by a provocateur.

Who is to blame? Not only the attackers and the police but also educators must share culpability for these social disasters. As an agency of social change, education in this country has demonstrably failed to produce human beings able to voluntarily accept diversity as an element of strength and unity.

What to do? In the short-term, law enforcers must act swiftly to restore peace and arrest those responsible for the violence. In education, however, things move at a snail's pace, yet teachings can have a great impact in the long run. The present saddening situation in the nation is an example; it reflects the result of long-time pedagogical wrongs committed in education.

For example, while we have never officially declared that one major group is superior to others, yet it had been "declared" in virtually every sphere of life. Consequently, our society is now suffering from the malaise of prejudice, with some minority sections of the long-spoiled majority appearing uneasy and unable to wholeheartedly embrace the emerging paradigm of pluralism.

It is timely for changes in the way we look at our society, and one way to achieve this is through civic education in schools. The subject of civic education originates from Pancasila Moral Education, the core of propaganda during the New Order regime. It then evolved to Pancasila and Civic Education that also received criticism because of its spirit of indoctrination. With the introduction of the new competence-based curriculum, the subject has now been changed to Civic Education.

The names have changed but how deeply have the syllabus changes taken place? The text books seem fine, with many offering of interactive tasks coupled with thought-provoking issues. The spirit of pluralism, indeed, is embedded in all chapters such as Human Rights Implementation and Its Implication; Freedom of Expression; Values, Norms, and Laws; and People's Participation in Regional Autonomy, which develops the issues of local cultures.

An interactive method of teaching, where teachers facilitate students through a learning experience, is currently regarded as the most effective kind of teaching. A 2002/2003 study conducted by the Center for Civic Education in six provinces in the country shows that students trying out the method participated enthusiastically in the experience (Suzanne Soule, 2004).

The study showed that if this methodology and new content was embraced and systematically applied, the prospects for our students in the long-run would be promising. However, given the state of the country's poorly paid, poorly trained teachers, it is doubtful the exercises in text books will be followed up by any concrete teaching changes in the classroom. Teachers' economically impoverished conditions mean they often have little time or desire for professional improvement.

Teachers in public and private schools are also regarded as agents of the state who are obliged to carry out other official duties. All this means the official syllabus often ends up being taught in a shallow manner.

What to do then? A form of supplementary teacher training to engender pluralism would be helpful, and the experiences of other countries are worth considering. In Israel, despite its complex society with religious, ethnic, national and migrant divisions, and the undeniable tensions caused by the Palestinian situation,

the role of voluntary organizations in providing extra teacher training to engender pluralism proved to be instrumental. And in India where caste has been the main stumbling block in efforts to promote pluralism, the role of NGOs has been virtually parallel to that of the state.

In Indonesia, there are also similar organizations, often with the support of multilateral agencies. But considering the vast archipelago with its ethnically and religiously complex society, they are just a drop of water in the ocean, meaning much must be done to support them and to encourage other responsible citizens to participate.

Of course, relying solely on the civic education subject to promote mutual understanding is inadequate. Promoting plurality requires serious efforts from teachers in all fields of study. And while we might not have high expectations of present teachers, we can find some hope in the students now studying at teacher training faculties.

Having teachers from racial and cultural majorities teach majority and minority students has deeply contributed to the absolute rule of the majority and the "forced obedience" on the part of the minority. Hence, balancing the number of teachers from both minority and majority groups is vital to help promote a genuine spirit of pluralism.

Local and religious leaders must get behind this idea. They, along with educators, should play a part in emphasizing the importance of preserving one's identity and fighting for one's right to play a substantial and meaningful role in the life of the nation.

In short, while emphasizing the teaching of pluralism will not stop the bombs or the violence straight away, it will slowly create peaceful coexistence within our incredibly diverse society. •

The Ban on Religious Pluralism

friend who is currently attending an international conference at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the U.S. sent an email. He wrote about his experience walking along a corridor, the Infinity Corridor, which not only functions to connect MIT's buildings but also to elucidate a metaphor about the long journey of prominent intellectuals to academic immortality.

One of the buildings connected by the corridor is the Mike Myer Building, named after a Jewish-American entrepreneur who built the center for the study of theoretical and applied physics. The front building is filled with pictures of outstanding scientists—like Faraday, Maxwell, Rutherford and others. Under these pictures one can read earnest acknowledgments about these scientists' contributions to civilization.

However, what astounded the friend and made him deeply proud was the inclusion of the pictures of Al-Hazen and Al-Jabir with their distinct Arabic visages—long beards and white robes—alongside the other scientists. This, the friend wrote, manifested the recognition of the West that Islamic civilization has had considerable role in mankind's development and that its contribution has also been a major foundation of the advancement of science in Western countries.

He said we should feel indebted that much of the invaluable knowledge inherited from the golden age of Islam had been "saved" and nurtured in the West for the betterment of modern civilization. The West did this when leaders in the Islamic world were preoccupied with amassing power, money or collecting harems, pampering their egos and instituting repressive styles of governance that virtually banned free thinking and effectively halted human civilization.

If the West had been narrow-minded, it would never have publicly admitted the contribution of Muslim scholars, nor would it have gracefully displayed their pictures in this most-respected research institution, my friend wrote.

Jurgen Habermas in Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity writes when reviewing Theunissen's position on Hegel's proposition: "In such a relation one partner is not the limit of the other's freedom, but the very condition of other's successful selfhood. And the communicative freedom of one individual cannot be complete without the realized freedom of all others."

This statement also explains the essence of "pluralism", which is still integrally part of all functioning diverse societies, and was also a vivid fact of life during the era of Prophet Muhammad in Medina, where people from many different faiths coexisted peacefully, respecting each other's roles at the individual and the collective level.

Therefore, when we discard "pluralism" on the simplistic grounds that this idea comes from the West, we don't only reject the very essence of our societies, we also begin to deny the existence of others; we start erecting a perilously divisive wall between "us" and "them".

This kind of thinking steadily builds an awareness that we will only complete our existence, or self-actualize, through the subordination or even the "disappearance" of other groups.

What would happen if this standpoint was pedagogically nurtured in our educational institutions, particularly in religiousaffiliated ones? What would emerge would be an authoritarian society that would in due course rob other groups of their rights and freedoms and then rob its followers of theirs. It would start with the persecution of "deviant" groups—like Ahmadiyah.

At a time when the nation needs people to pull together to confront the multifaceted problems it faces, such narrow-minded intolerance is extremely regrettable.

Therefore, when a colleague asked for my comments on the controversial fatwa issued by the conservative state-sanctioned Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), which ruled that religious pluralism was against Islam because of its alleged campaign for "relative truth", I could only sadly reply: "My deepest condolences for pluralism which has received the 'death penalty' in our country. It is perhaps time to throw the bhinneka tunggal ika slogan (unity in diversity) into the rubbish bin."

It should be noted that when a claim that one religious teaching is the "most-truthful" and others are "less-truthful" is seen to be exclusively endorsed by the state, an undue tension among believers is inevitable. Already some conscientious citizens with clear minds have rejected this bigotry, but this will still potentially hinder the spirit of interfaith dialog and multi-religious education.

In short, societies need enough room to act upon what they perceive as their religious or spiritual duties, and it is the prime obligation of the state to ensure that all religions are equally free to exist without fear of persecution. •

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Teachers as a Liberating Force

he threat by former Golkar chairman Akbar Tandjung to sue teacher and school textbook author Retno Listyarti is quite alarming for the teaching profession, the members of which have suffered for decades from low salaries and poor social status in society.

In our country, teachers are regarded as being members of a profession that has high moral integrity, so "high" that money or any kind of material reward is often considered too "low" to be presented to teachers in appreciation for their earnest efforts to mold the character of this nation. That's why they are labeled, almost officially, as "heroes with no reward", which—due to their lowly social conditions—looks more like humiliation than appreciation.

During the independence movement, parallel with our physical struggle to liberate this nation from colonialism, an education movement was also significant in liberating this nation from backwardness. Riding his bicycle, a teacher would be warmly welcomed and be assisted by his students to park his bike at the school. In circumstances where the desire for independence was high, the teacher would enthusiastically impart his zeal for independence to his pupils, who would attentively listen to him. Teachers were not only members of a noble profession, but also a liberating force.

Time has changed, values have evolved. During the developmentalism era of the New Order, teachers still had their political role, but they were used more as "state agents" to indoctrinate their pupils with the New Order's authoritarian ideology. At a time when teachers and students needed to develop

creative thinking, the old paradigms of the colonial era were preserved for the sake for preserving the New Order regime's thirst for power. Development thrived, but not intellectuality in the true sense of the term, and the welfare of teachers remained rock bottom.

During the reform era, teachers' welfare has remained near the bottom. Nevertheless, a new idealism on the part of teachers to reorientate their roles in society has emerged. The movement, unfortunately, appears to be highly fragmented and some brave teachers have already fallen victim. Nurlaila, for example, was fired from her position of a teacher in a state-ran junior high school (SMP) in Jakarta when she blew the whistle on alleged corruption in a land-swap deal involving her school and the local government.

Just recently, a senior high school civics teacher, Retno Listyarti, came under intense political pressure after Akbar Tandjung, a powerful Golkar Party politician, threatened to sue her over a textbook she wrote that highlighted his high profile graft case (in which, incidentally, he was acquitted by the Supreme Court).

What can we infer from such cases? They show a new pattern of relations between teachers and society. Under the New Order, teachers were detached from society and were often accused of presenting something remote from students.

Now, however, with the new spirit of openness, the teacher's role is something that has evolved and is tailored differently—inevitably different as each teacher may have a different interpretation of his role. Conceptually, a teacher's role sparks a sense of universality, something that all teachers need to adhere to, but realistically the "self" of teachers cannot be ignored.

As one expert argues, "The teacher brings into the classroom his views of his job, his prejudices, his personal fears and inadequacies, his ambitions, his humanity and affection." Despite drawbacks and difficulties, the recently introduced competency-based curriculum should be able to convert the "anxiety" of teachers into something pedagogically beneficial for the development of pupils.

This is the area where teachers can strike a balance, meaning that if given enough room to creatively maneuver, teachers can maximize their potential to meet societal demands and concurrently "realize" their ideal perception of society in the classroom. Thus, it could help narrow the gap between the school and outside world.

While the issue of teachers' welfare can be advanced as something that retards teacher creativity, as one writer argued in this paper a while ago, one school might be materially poor, but spiritually rich. This analogy can also be applied to individual teachers. He might be materially poor, but resourcefully rich, such as is the case with Retno Lisyarti, who ingeniously turned a critical thinking lesson into something more contextual by relating it to the factual case of a public figure, Akbar Tandjung.

What is most important now—since the state is nearly bankrupt when it comes to providing decent teacher training—is to at least provide teachers with a supportive atmosphere so that they can professionally develop themselves without fear of being constrained.

Issuing an ambiguous press statement merely stating that the case is the publisher's responsibility and teachers have the right to choose factual cases as discourse topics is hideously insufficient; the Ministry of National Education should provide concrete legal assistance to Retno. Although the teaching profession bill has not been passed into law, the case will reveal to what extent the state is genuinely concerned with the protection of teachers' academic freedom.

Suing a high school teacher like Retno for Rp 10 billion does not only humiliate her, but also all teachers, who still are forced to live in unacceptable conditions. This also constitutes blatant intimidation, which might kill off teacher creativity and academic freedom.

It would be more gracious for Akbar Tandjung to concentrate on doing good deeds that benefit the people so that he can be more favorably portrayed in the next edition of Retno's civics textbook.

Above all, preparing students to be critical of their own society is crucial to helping this nation escape from its entrenched problems. So, let the teachers once again be a liberating force! •

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Education for Peace Vital for Reintegration in Aceh

uring the three-decade war between the Indonesian Military (TNI) and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), burning down schools in conflict areas was a common occurrence, with the two sides generally blaming each other for the vandalism.

This of course was before the Dec. 26 tsunami destroyed hundreds more schools in the province last year.

Thankfully, the disaster struck at the consciences of the conflicting parties. The peace deal signed recently in Helsinki wrought many important concessions from both sides and has given many the hope the Acehnese can begin living lives free from conflict. More importantly, a prolonged peace would allow new generations of Acehnese access to a better, more enlightening form of education.

The peace has seen hundreds of GAM fighters coming down from the hills and reuniting with their villages and families, with some even having coffee with their old foes in the TNI. But this peace has presented a new challenge: How will this emotionally and politically divided society successfully reintegrate?

This is certainly a question too complex to answer in this article, but it should be noted that the memorandum of understanding underlines that the Indonesian government should aid the reintegration of former GAM fighters into society. This reintegration is not just supposed to involve former GAM fighters but also their family members, including their school-aged children—the future generation who will navigate the fate of the province.

This means that education—as an agent of social change—will play a vital role in the reintegration. Conducted under a brutal military rule, peace-building education programs were often virtually meaningless as they encountered pedagogical difficulties in exemplifying how beautiful living in peace is. With the military offensive gone, it should be easier for such programs to equate theory with practice.

In essence, education for peace has several characteristics:

First, this learning experience tends to encourage global perspectives rather than narrowly chauvinistic or ethnocentric ones.

Second, this learning experience is concerned with respecting others' rights and the attainment of human dignity.

Third, it is open-minded and participatory rather than closed-minded, authoritarian, dogmatic and domineering.

Fourth, it promotes social literacy skills in non-violent resolution of conflicts.

Fifth, it puts a high importance on caring, compassionate and humane ethical standards rather than an uncritical endorsement of physical violence and war, alienation and structural violence.

Therefore, taking Aceh's contextual reality into account, there are some points worth considering.

Much has to be done to enhance the understanding among students that their peers from "enemy" families are still their Acehnese brothers and sisters who were also victims of prolonged injustice. Many former GAM fighters and their families are still frightened that revenge on them may still take place—but in other forms.

Indeed, Islamic and traditional Acehnese values could encourage a sense of brotherhood and unity in the province but these values should be managed carefully, especially regarding the issue of Acehnese and non-Acehnese. Meaningful dialog about different sides' feelings should be pursued in a cautious, respectful but also candid manner to ensure that all members of

society regardless of their ethnicity and religion can voluntarily live in harmony.

Dialog could be encouraged by having students visit families of other ethnicities and participate in class discussions about how peace was attained in other volatile parts of the world—part of a participatory civic education subject.

The experiences of many conflict areas around the world also show that teacher neutrality is crucial in education for peace. As members of the war-torn Acehnese society, teachers are also likely to have been emotionally disturbed by the conflict as many of their colleagues will have been kidnapped or killed and many of their schools burned down. Despite this, it is vital teachers remain uncompromisingly neutral in front of their students.

Regarding the TNI, as long as they remain in the province, a feeling of being betrayed by the peace accord could easily affect non-Acehnese soldiers, many of whom have been demoralized since the fall of Soeharto.

If these soldiers were encouraged to go to schools, meet with students and tell their stories about their families, many of whom have also suffered in this conflict, this might steadily help erase the brutal image of the TNI in the eyes of many students and encourage the soldiers to act more humanely in future.

Nevertheless, all this will be a superficial solution if the hearts and minds of the Acehnese are still shrouded in doubt and fear. Therefore, Jakarta and GAM are left with no option but to sincerely implement the peace accord.

The conflicting parties might have dropped some of their weapons but will they really be willing to provide future generations with books and pens? Or will they just evolve into more power-hungry administrations that neglect education and are happy to keep the Acehnese in a state of backwardness? Time will tell.

Religiosity in the Era of Self-Consumerism, Self-Satisfaction

Ahmad Fuad Fanani and Alpha Amirrachman

his current era of consumerism has appallingly become our lifestyle, and it is obvious that human beings are increasingly dependent upon ever-developing technology. Consciously or not, our lives now greatly depend on the commercials that splash out at us in different media, virtually every minute.

The existence of human beings as a "sacred" creature being blessed with an ability to think and create has been steadily "taken over" by technology, which has always come in a new form with a new menu offered.

This circumstance is now underpinned by a global system, which grants a wider sphere to the growth of capitalism and global corporations. Consequently, human beings are competing more passionately to search for both individual satisfaction and material gain. It often happens with less concern towards other segments of society, who are not fortunate enough to be able to join the "competition". It also pushes us all toward the destruction of social and environmental health.

Capitalistic international institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and WTO have become the "Unholy Trinity" whose advice has always become a "mantra" for the majority of world citizens.

Admittedly or not, under these circumstances, our religiosity has been under great influence due to the sociological fact that religiosity has always been intimately connected with the prevailing social and economic norms of the day. In the past, religion was referred to as a guiding torch to lead people to reach serenity and to cleanse them of sins.

For the underprivileged, religion can ease their tough lives. For others who suffer from "ivory tower syndrome", religion might be seen as knowledge of philosophy to be intellectually discussed, instead of putting it into socially beneficial practice. All of these forms of religiosity, in essence, are manifestations of the religion of modern human beings.

There are at least six models of religiosity in this era of consumerism.

First, there is a traditional model that defends "old" conventions in dealing with the socially pervasive problems. For example, in dealing with accusations that one particular religion is a trigger of terrorism; but those who follow this model would blame this on their own fellow followers. They simultaneously and paradoxically adopt and practice religious teachings and foreign values without filtering them.

Second, there is a fundamental model that tends to blame others without a willingness to conduct internal criticism or evaluation of one's own group. As the followers declare that their religion is the only righteous interpretation and manifestation of the divine, others that are not part of their faction would be regarded as wrong, and therefore heretical.

These kinds of people are often trapped in the thinking of conspiracy theories and tend to try to answer today's problems with answers used in past times, meaning that they merely believe completely—without earnestly paying attention to context that the past glory can serve as a final answer to today's moral destruction, political failures and social bankruptcy.

Third, there is a virtuous model, like the one Indonesian scholar Moeslim Abdrurrahman (2004) identifies. This model has little enthusiasm about giving enough space to thinking or contemplating. The followers tend to regard the prevailing

problems as things that need to be dealt with using concrete social actions. Thinking and contemplating have been considered alienating activities, and the major agenda of religiosity is to help each other. They consider the most religious person is one who is mostly committed to social work such, as generously assisting the underprivileged.

Fourth, there is a "packaging" model, which offers an instant "parcel" of religion. The people that embrace this tend to think that they become religious once they are able to fulfill all their "formal" religious duties, such as performing a pilgrimage to Mecca. They usually decorate their cars and houses with religious symbols and simply think that they can be religious in a clean and fragrant room. They likewise tend to help the underprivileged, but mostly on a superficial and symbolic level.

Fifth, there is the sufistic model, which mostly concentrates on nurturing sincere hearts and purifying personalities, widely known in Indonesia as manajemen qolbu. They tend to guard themselves against moral destruction that may result from their perceived socially degraded surroundings. They are fond of asking people to routinely gather and pray together; mostly because, according to this model, social destruction is the foreseeable result of collective misdeeds of society. They are also fond of asking fellow group members to cry together to ask for forgiveness from God.

The aforementioned models are actually a kind of contest to win God's patronage, and they emerge as a reaction to prevalent consumerism. These phenomena have surfaced also to a degree because religiosity consists of deeply personal experiences, which collectively form a diverse segment of society.

Indeed, one group might be idealistic, others might be pragmatic. However, one does not need to feel doubt about earnestly practicing what is believed because religiosity is the protected right of human beings. While each group might claim to the be the only righteous one, this contest is actually constructive

when each group can truthfully appreciate the existence of others.

On the other hand, religious tension and violence can inevitably erupt when the spirit of dialog and tolerance is not well cherished. It is, therefore, vital to note that one group must not see itself as superior to others. Wallahu a'lam bisshawab.

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Giving Teachers and Lecturers Their Dues

ov. 25 will be a moment of truth for the education sector in Indonesia. It is the day the government and the House of Representatives (DPR) have agreed to officially endorse the teachers and lecturers bill and to recognize "Teachers and Lecturers NationalDay" after a six year-delay.

The bill itself, however, remains controversial.

The largest bone of contention with educationalists surrounds the welfare of teachers and lecturers. Article 13 states that teachers and lecturers are entitled to "decent" salaries and conditions. It is hoped that their salaries would be adjusted to at least three times higher than non-teacher civil servants in the same classification (golongan) who are already entitled to other professional incentives.

It remains to be seen whether the government will be able to meet the requirements in the new bill. The suspicion that the bill is merely a ploy to divert public attention away from the fuel price hikes could turn out to be justifiable.

The bill also mainly addresses teachers and lecturers who work for state institutions, not private ones. Many educationalists argue that the bill is therefore discriminatory, as most education in this country is run by the private sector. However, the government is unlikely to be able to provide incentives for the private sector due to financial constraints.

It is also not realistic to expect the government to set explicit rules regarding private teacher salaries as each private institution has different standards and financial capacities. On the issue of legal protection for private teachers and lecturers, the new law on foundations (yayasan) is considered adequately progressive by most observers; the problem, as in most cases in our country, lies in it iimplementation.

The bill should instead create a competitive atmosphere between private and government institutions in education quality and teacher welfare.

In this era of decentralization, it would be moving against the clock if every segment of society remains dependent on the central government. Decentralization should give private educational institutions the authority to run their own affairs, particularly for community-based education.

As importantly, the bill rules that any teacher association should conform to existing regulations, meaning it should be in the form of a legal entity with the usual administrative requirements, such as a minimum number of members and representatives in selected cities throughout the country.

Although it is understandable that one teacher association may not always be a true representative of teachers, this seems to be a restriction in disguise, stopping teachers from freely articulating their political aspirations.

During my research fieldwork, no matter "chaotic" the political atmosphere was due to the burgeoning of teacher associations, a genuine teacher association would always survive and a bogus one, which was riddled with short-term political interests and often needlessly disturbed the running of the local government, would die due to the lack of support.

Teacher education is also being poorly addressed. While the minimum academic qualifications of undergraduate and diploma four (D-4)might be acceptable, a minimum number of 36 credits to achieve "competence" is grossly inadequate. This is partly because of the conversion of Teaching Training Institutions (IKIP) into universities. The change is based on wrong-headed perceptions—or perhaps even a sense of inferiority; that IKIP graduates are somehow less qualified than university graduates.

Let's hope the bill is not merely an attempt to whitewash over people's fears about education in this increasingly difficult time. Despite its flaws, there is still a hope the bill is a step forward, if not a major leap. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, November 18, 2005

Teachers and the Lack of Democratic Character

"yes", including Victoria Camps in her essay Education for Democracy. She wrote, "If democratic behavior means the acquisition of certain habits, certain civic virtues, these can only be inculcated through education." Therefore, according to this argument, no one is born a democrat. America, for example, underwent hundreds of years before the country came of age and reached democratic "maturity", yet its leading politicians claim that democracy is still not the best system, merely a bit better than any other system of government.

Democracy is more process-oriented rather than outputoriented. It is, thus, an exhausting effort, yet considered fairer as all possibilities are diligently debated and all interest groups are consulted. The output might not be perfect, but should be acceptable to all, thus reducing potential conflicts among the "political animals". This, according to Victoria Camps, highlights the vital role of education in shaping the minds and deeds of people to acquire certain democratic values.

From this perceptive, Indonesia can be considered both fortunate and unfortunate. It is fortunate because it has now finally become a democracy. It is, however, at the same time unfortunate, because the development of democracy has been moving at a snails pace despite all the potential it has with the diversity of its people. Take a look at India, a nation that gained its independence at almost the same time as Indonesia. India has consistently trained itself as a democratic state and continuously upheld academic freedom and enhanced its academic standing while the latter has

plunged into authoritarianism with rigid indoctrination and textbased learning in classrooms.

While many praised Indonesia for its swift move to democracy, it has nevertheless been marred by incidents which do not reflect democratic values. The euphoria saw tragic incidents in a form of sectarian and religious conflicts such as in Poso and Ambon, along with secessionist struggles in Aceh and West Papua and bombings by militant fundamentalists. Worse still, Indonesia's democracy has practically been abused by the feeling of superiority of the majority over the minority.

Indeed, it is a utopian ideal that education can bring about such a swift change in attitude within societies. But efforts have been made, including the overhaul of civic education, although the vibrant teaching material would not be of any use if teachers generally still lack competence and their welfare is neglected.

But has the attitude of teachers been influenced by this new atmosphere? Do the recent cases—such as the increasingly critical voice of many teacher organizations—show the shift in this attitude, from merely passing on knowledge to being open-minded and critical educators? It is hard to answer, but democracy is also training by doing.

And no matter shallow and superficial it would seem, teachers' increasingly critical awareness of the life of this nation should be judged in an appropriate manner. Why? Because this is a sign that we are on the right track toward the molding of the democratic character of our students.

But have teachers received the appreciation that they deserve? I don't think so. Democratic character should include sincerity in looking at ourselves critically and—if necessary—boldly but honestly stripping away our own weaknesses. This is what was vividly displayed by teachers during the national commemoration of Teacher's Day which was attended by Vice President Jusuf Kalla.

Prof. Winarno Surakhmad, a senior and noted educationist, read out a poem during which he had to pause several times due

to the raucous applause of thousands of teachers, "When will our school buildings improve their grade from just a chicken coop? Here is buried the remains of a teacher, who died of starvation after living on a salary that runs out after only one day." But to the surprise of many teachers and guests, the red-faced Vice President scolded them in a high-handed tone: "Teachers (should) form the nation's soul and character. If you mock the nation, who will respect it?" (The Jakarta Post, Nov. 28, 2005).

Kalla is undoubtedly correct that teachers are burdened with the responsibility of helping shape the nation's soul and character, but what he failed to realize is that such a noble duty would not be able to succeed without the ability to take a critical look at ourselves. What Professor Winarno did was to merely reflect on the saddening reality of education in this country.

This incident shows how the authoritarian attitude is still subconsciously embedded in the minds and deeds of our leaders, besides sadly demonstrating that the perception that teachers are mere conduits of knowledge—not innovative agents of social change—and that their job is only to teach, not educate, is still also deeply rooted in the mind-set of our leaders.

Some would say Kalla was just expressing his opinion honestly, but his reaction sends a clear but threatening message that a critical and reflective attitude should be not be part of a teacher's character. While the incident will not halt the march of this nation toward democracy, it shows how some elements of our society are still trapped in a state of denial toward our own shortcomings, an attitude that would instead weaken teachers' spirit and slow the recovery of this sick nation. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, December 21, 2005

Are We a True Reflective Nation?

eflection in this context refers to a thought, idea or opinion formed as the result of deep contemplation on an action or value that has been put into practice.

John Dewey (1859-1952), one of America's most influential philosophers, said the "union of observation and memory" was at the heart of a reflection.

Can our nation be reflective? Is our society adequately reflective amid today's rapid global changes?

When we contemplate the history of this nation—particularly from the independence struggle and the proclamation of independence in 1945 up to now—it is evident that at certain junctures the spirit to improve the quality of this nation was overwhelming.

The student movement, at any given time, such as the fall of Soeharto and Sukarno, has always been remarkable in introducing a new paradigm while overthrowing the oppressive rulers.

The people vowed thereafter the practices of the old regime would never be repeated and they would stick to the universal values of democracy and human rights.

But was this the result of true reflection or just a reaction to prolonged societal dissatisfaction? It was probably a combination of the two, but given the chaotic circumstances following the fall of Soeharto in 1998, would appear to have been more reactionary than the result of reflection.

Moreover, these vigorous efforts were somewhat wasted through our failure to stick to our new commitment and the fact that we became trapped again by the promises of the new government. Through a historical lens, we can see how terrible practices such as authoritarianism always prevailed after the much-welcomed new era. It is disturbing to realize that we often did not need to wait for long to see and become victims of the practices that had previously been carried out under the old regime.

For example, still fresh in our minds is that our civil servants were forced to become members of the ruling party, Golkar, in the Soeharto era.

Recently, however, Vice President Jusuf Kalla voiced the need to return the "political rights" of civil servants.

Another example is that the press was subject to tight controls during the Soeharto era, yet the government recently issued a regulation on the control of broadcasters, soon to be followed by more restrictions on print media.

Why is it always like this? Apparently, our capacity for true reflection is always undermined by our greed and shortsightedness. In spite of the blood and tears shed to achieve this freedom—which has blessed us with ample opportunities—we cannot be satisfied in our triumph and fail to make good on our commitments.

Notably, a reflection that is guided by morality, integrity, and commitment, not a mere reaction driven by impulses and desires, is what this nation crucially needs.

However, given the fact that there has not been even a loud and unremitting voice in rejecting the recent setbacks, let alone measured collective efforts, one has enough reason to be skeptical of this ailing and self-ignoring nation's capacity to learn from its past experiences. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, January 7, 2006

Untirta Tries to Break 'Literature Deadlock'

marginalized the value of humanity. In education, for example, subjects that are perceived to be able to broaden one's knowledge and skills to survive in the era, such as economics, have become the darling among many students.

Education is now merely taken for jobs—for money—and no longer for molding character by instilling values such as honesty, sensitivity and tolerance. Other social sciences that are somewhat considered to be "less money-oriented", such as Indonesian literature, are increasingly marginalized.

"So we need to break this `literature deadlock'," argued Wan Anwar, head of the Literature and Bahasa Indonesia Department of the Faculty of Education at Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa State University (Untirta) in Serang, Banten.

The department conducted a one-day seminar called "Enhancing the Quality of Literature and Bahasa Indonesia Teaching at School" on December 17, 2005.

While it was open to the public, the seminar attracted many schoolteachers, particularly from Banten province, as it aimed to explore an enjoyable but effective way of learning and teaching literature at school.

Guest speakers of the seminar were Riris Sarumpaet, an Indonesian literature professor from the University of Indonesia, Abdul Chaer, an expert on teaching Bahasa Indonesia from Jakarta State University (UNJ), and Ahmadun Y. Herfanda, a Jakarta-based poet whose poetry and short stories have been widely published in the national media.

Riris, who is also chairwoman of the Association of Scholars of Indonesian Literature (HISKI), lamented that many Bahasa Indonesia teachers needed to respect the profession that they had chosen for themselves, and should not lose their zest for teaching literature. Riris urged that the teachers "re-internalize" literature.

"How many of you cry when you read a heart-breaking poem? How many of you really urge your students to appreciate literature and explore the depths of its meaning?" she challenged the overwhelmed audience

Meanwhile Abdul Chaer, a prolific writer of books on linguistics, shared his long-time experience in teaching Bahasa Indonesia. He specifically defined literature as a "language phenomenon" that has received appreciation around the world, but not so much in this country. He shared the theoretical and academic aspects of teaching literature, and also practical knowhow to tackle potential problems in class.

Ahmadun Y. Herfanda, drawing upon his creative experience as a poet, said expectations were high that the study of literature would not merely end with a mastery of literary theory, but also with a sufficient degree of writing skills. Succumbing to the audience's enthusiasm, Ahmadun eventually read a few of his poems in his usual, unique aura of spirituality.

Perhaps because of this encouraging atmosphere, several participating teachers began to stand and address questions to the speakers, while others read their own poems to the applause of their colleagues.

More notably, the participants appeared delighted that the seminar also marked the inauguration of the Banten branch of HISKI. HISKI Banten is headed by Untirta's Chussaery and Yudi Juniardi as, respectively, chairman and secretary.

Untirta is very much aware of the problems faced by teachers particularly literature teachers-ranging from conflicting government policies to insufficient facilities and to low salaries.

It is because of this that the department has initiated regular

activities to promote literature awareness among HISKI students, such as the bimonthly "Afternoon Appreciation" program, which that involve students to encourage them to appreciate literature through reading, writing and performing plays.

The program has invited many figures from the literary and cultural communities, including: Jakarta-based poet Jamal D. Rahman, Yogyakarta-based short story writer Joni Ariadinata, Tangerang-based short story writer Khusnul Khuluqy, Bandung-based drama actor Ayi Kurnia Iskandar, Bandung-based actor Wawan Sofwan, Bandung-based novelist Dewi Sartika, Jakarta-based poet Dodi Ahmad Fawdzy and Chaedar Alwasilah, a professor of English at Indonesian Education University of Bandung (UPI).

The program was also marked by the launch of a book by several Aceh-based poets titled 8.9 Skala Richter, Lalu Tsunami (8.9 on the Richter scale, then the tsunami).

For 2006, it plans to invite Taufiq Ismail, a senior man of letters, novelist Gola Gong and Lampung-based poet Isbedy Setiawan, who has earned the title of "the pope of Indonesian literature".

Poet Wan Anwar, who is also an editor of national literary magazine Horison, cannot agree more with Riris that during the contemporary era, in which moral degradation is so pervasive and corruptors rule this country, "people in the literary community can come to the fore as a moral force by sharing with our students the spirit of humanity, the values of which are abundant in the world of literature".

But he also stressed that "we need earnest cooperation from all concerned parties to make this possible—to make literature an enjoyable and meaningful subject at school". •

First published by The Jakarta Post, February 5, 2006

RI Schools Languish in Educational Backwater

he National Education Standardization Agency (BSNP) is reportedly planning to overhaul the much-criticized Competency-based Curriculum (CBC), which was introduced only in 2004, because of the yawning gap between its "ideal" and the very reality of our education system's condition.

Among the perceived problems is that the existing curriculum contains more subjects than the preceding one. This has resulted in more work for both teachers and students, while the CBC strangely emphasizes "process", which requires flexibility and creativity during the learning process.

Moreover, the definition of competency is never clear. Compounded by its complicated indicators of the subject content, the curriculum looks more like a maze than an effective guideline.

Likewise, except in a few top schools that participated in the pilot projects, most teachers and students could not live up to the CBC demands. Many teachers are still trapped in the old paradigm of one-way-traffic communication and most students are also trapped, preferring to wait for direct and detailed instructions.

This country has so far changed its curriculum seven times, but education quality remains grossly low and the country is forced to languish as a backwater among its neighbors. Education fails not only to bridge the education and industry sector, but more crucially to build intellectual and emotional aspects of humans - as evidenced by the many, many student brawls and communal conflicts.

What is wrong with our education and its curriculum development? It is hard to answer in a simple way as it requires a holistic approach to answer and there are, indeed, interwoven factors. But in order to identify its possible weaknesses, it is important to locate the issue of orientation in our curriculum development which, I would argue, seems acutely lacking.

Principally, according to Elliot W. Eisner and Elizabeth Vallance in their edited book Conflicting Conceptions of Curriculum, there are five curricular orientations.

First, curriculum as the development of cognitive processes highlights the importance of "the inclusion of materials and activities associated with processes and aimed at learning objectives related to learner's abilities to solve problems, think and become independent in the pursuit of understanding the world about them".

Accordingly, this means more emphasis on the process and connection between cognitive aspects and useful practicality that will help students appreciate their life, something that is clearly missing in our education, particularly given the controversial National Exam, which merely seems to emphasize output rather than process and excessively highlights cognitive aspects without enough attempts to relate them to affective and psychomotoric aspects.

Second, technology should not be seen merely as a "hardware". Therefore, the crucial element in technology is the measures and techniques of instruction and their related methodical knowledge.

In the face of the inadequate "hardware" facilities, this paradigm breaks the "lazy perception" that now teachers should be mainly assisted by advanced gadgets, which are non-existent in most schools across the country. Technology here is seen more as a "technique" of teachers to creatively make use of whatever facilities are around them.

Third, curriculum should have the spirit of learning creatively with "faith and reverence" through exercising responsible freedom, searching for the fullness of disciplined understanding and participating in unremitting dialogic query. This means the curriculum should encourage students to experience

"transcendental" processes in learning activities.

Fourth, curriculum should be designed to support perceptions of social reconstruction that see schooling as an agent of social change, and which is relevant to the interests of both students and societies. As such, curriculum should help students grasp problems of larger societies from where their personal problems have stemmed from.

Fifth, curriculum as an academic rationale is to encourage students to be grateful for the works that comprise the diverse intellectual and inventive disciplines, but proposes that the emphasis is put not on topics or subjects but forms of thoughts.

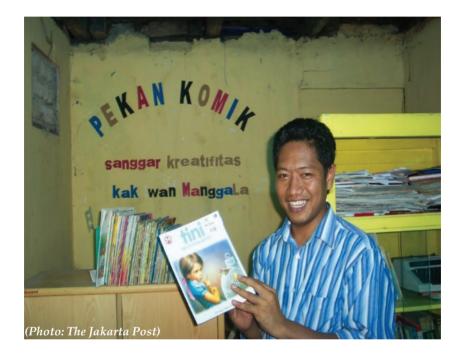
In this case, academic rationalism does not merely mean multiplying the number of subjects in the curriculum (and making it as thick as possible!), but categorizing them in the form of thoughts that students can easily comprehend.

A curriculum might contain the five key interrelated orientations; however, it should have an emphasis as to avoid the "clash" or the excessiveness, which might instead blur its objective.

I do not mean to praise certain aspects at the expense of others, but against the backdrop of the situation where moral degradation, intolerance and dehumanization seem so pervasive, I just cannot agree more to an argument advanced by a noted education expert, Michael Apple, that what we need is not merely a "functional" literacy, but a "critical" literacy which "enables the growth of genuine understanding and control of all of the spheres of social life in which we participate."

Above all, nonetheless, whatever curriculum orientation or its combination is chosen, it inevitably needs open-minded teachers as the public engages intellectuals who are well-trained and are liberated from the old paradigm. Without this, we will remain abhorrently ensnared in our imprudent trial-and-error experiment in curriculum development. •

Irwan Tahir Manggala: Promoting Education in Maluku



f in Jakarta you recognize Kak Seto as a person dedicated to children's education, in Maluku you will meet Irwan Tahir Manggala, or Kak Iwan, concerned with the development of children's education in a province that was once wracked by communal conflict.

To help improve education in the conflict-torn province, Irwan set up Sanggar Kreativitas Anak (Children's Creativity Studio) in the provincial capital, Ambon, in 2000. His move was triggered by his emotional experience when previously involved in helping children of internally displaced people at a refugee camp.

At that time, on his own initiative, Irwan set up outdoor English classes to help erase the tragic memories from the minds of the children and improve their English skills before the government and NGOs came to the province to provide more organized assistance.

He later decided to set up the studio dedicated to teaching English to children. Himself a teacher at state Islamic junior high school Madrasah Tsanawiyah Kebon Cengkih, Ambon, Irwan welcomed children to learn and play in a studio that he rented for Rp 1,500,000 a year, located adjacent to his home in Jl. Baru, Kelurahan Honipopu, Ambon.

There are around 200 English books in the studio, mostly donated by concerned parties such as international NGO Save the Children. Almost every day, children arrive to learn English and play games facilitated by Irwan.

Born on March 8, 1967, Irwan completed his elementary education in Ambon, Maluku.

He continued his studies in Makassar until his finished his bachelors degree in English Education from Alaudin Makassar State Islamic Education Institute in 1993 before returning to Ambon to take up teaching in 1995.

Married to Rahmawaty, and with two children, Irwan loved children and dedicated himself to teaching students at junior high school level. After teaching, he always went straight home to take care of his studio.

When The Jakarta Post visited Irwan at his studio, a group of junior high school students were there. They had traveled from Western Seram, a newly formed district, more than two hours ferry journey from Ambon.

"We came here to learn English from Kak Iwan," said Siti, in the second grade at junior high school, adding that she also wanted to tell Irwan about the disheartening state of education in the newly formed district.

Before the conflict, Irwan had won first prize in the highly-

competitive National Teacher Creativity Competition (LKG) held by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) in August 1997 with his Cas Cis Cus English program.

He asked students to role-play specific situations such as in a bank, supermarket, hospital and other public places. Some acted as public officers, others as consumers, in a bid to expose students to English, something lacking in Indonesia where English is treated as a foreign language, not a second or third language.

After the conflict, in a bid at reconciliation to reduce religious tensions, Irwan initiated a "multireligious" soccer game held in a court near his studio, just 50 meters from the location of an-Nur Mosque and Silo Church, which were burned down by a mob during the sectarian conflict.

The court itself marked a line that separates Christian from Muslim communities. Children from the two religiously segregated communities were invited to participate in the game. They gleefully joined in—Muslim children against Christians.

"People think that the area has always been prone to tension. That's not true," said Irwan, adding that about 300 people from the two communities enthusiastically watched the game.

In appreciation for his unremitting dedication to children's education and his valuable role in pursuing reconciliation, Irwan also received an award from the Department of Religious Affairs as Best Teacher in Maluku province on Dec. 7, 2005.

Irwan is upbeat on prospects for education in Maluku: "People here are generally determined that they can leave behind tragic memories and build a new life. Besides, they all eat fish, which is very healthful for brain development.

"Thus, what we need is proper supporting educational facilities," he said, referring to his soccer game where participating children were high-spirited, and the Cas Cis Cus program where students had no hesitation to speak in English. •

Wien Muldian Campaigns for Literary Development



uring a World Book Day celebration on March 3, 2006, the head of the National Education Library (Perpustakaan Pendidikan Nasional), Wien Muldian, invited Fuad Hassan to speak at a discussion on literacy development in the country.

The discussion was held in the library, located within the Education Ministry's compound.

The visit stunned and angered high officials at the ministry. They thought that Wien, who started working at the library on Jan. 1, 2005, did not properly inform them that the former education minister would be visiting.

"I wrote a letter informing my superiors, but it appears the

letter did not reach them, maybe because there are so many letters in the bureaucracy," said Wien during a recent interview with The Jakarta Post.

Thanks to Wien's innovative ideas, the library, which has some 7,000 members, is often crowded with visitors. The facility does not only provide books, but also Internet and audio-visual services. A pleasant coffee shop also graces a corner.

The library is strikingly decorated with colorful signs and walls, provoking in visitors feelings of relaxation and comfort.

Various activities are regularly conducted in the fully airconditioned library, including documentary film screenings, children's origami workshops and book discussions.

Wien said he was determined to optimize the library, which was established in November 2004, in serving the people. Many public libraries in Indonesia, he said, had turned into mere warehouses for dusty and worn-out books.

"Public libraries should serve public interests, and school libraries should serve students' interests," he stressed.

Wien said Education Minister Bambang Sudibyo had agreed to expand the library area "so that in future, this entire main building would comprise the minister's office and the library".

Last year, Wien helped small local publishers to sell their books by inviting them to hold an exhibition called the 50 Percent Book Event: Exhibition of Cheap Books, where the books on display were sold at 50 percent of their catalog price.

The stalls had such a cheap lease that the publishers could afford a discount of up to 60 percent. Around 3,000 people visited the event every day for nine consecutive days; thousands of books were sold.

Since its opening, hundreds of literacy and literary events have been conducted in the National Education Library. Wien also targets national days such as Education Day and Awakening Day to hold book bazaars or exhibitions.

The library has likewise launched a special corner for the blind.

"And we have U.S.-made software that enables the blind to read all the printed books here," Wien said.

Born May 3, 1972, in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, Wien grew up in a family of book lovers.

He attended Muhammadiyah elementary school, where he spent much of his time reading books in its small library. When he attended junior high school in Cirebon, West Java, he regularly visited a public library in the city.

During his time at SMA 16 high school in West Jakarta, Wien invited renowned writer Hilman Hariwijaya to speak about his creative process in writing Lupus, a novel that was very popular among young readers at the time.

After his father died, Wien had to burn the candle at both ends to finance his studies and buy books. So he started moonlighting as a conductor on a M-16 Meruya-Tanah Abang mikrolet (public minivan), which would also take him to the University of Indonesia (UI), where he was a student.

Wien majored in Library Science at UI, only to find the classes too technical and boring.

His innovative approach toward literacy was evident even then, as he invited Pasar Senen book sellers to sell their books at the university—"so I could get books for free".

As editor-in-chief of Suara Mahasiswa (Students' voice) bulletin, Wien regularly invited famous writers to a discussion at the university. He also led the university's student press and was involved in the student publication Harian Aksi Bergerak! (Active action daily) during and after the 1998 reformasi movement.

His 1996 visit to Japan, a country with a high literacy rate, further strengthened Wien's desire to push for literacy development in Indonesia.

He later traveled throughout the archipelago to hunt for books, collecting more than 12,000 books for his private library.

"I am particularly interested in social and human issues," Wien said of his collection.

Wien established the Forum Indonesia Membaca (Indonesia Reading Forum) in October 2001 and in just two years, it had successfully distributed more than 800,000 books nationally. With 70 volunteers, the forum helped set up around 100 taman bacaan ("reading gardens", or small libraries) around the country.

He said he was skeptical about the common perception that Indonesians had little enthusiasm for reading: "The problem, I think, is more about limited access to reading materials."

Wien said the government should help encourage the opening up of small bookstores around the country.

"The government can help facilitate incentives or soft loans for people to open bookstores."

The establishment of community-based libraries that involved the support of local publishers is also important, he said.

"And a library is not only about books," Wien stressed, "but also a cultural center where literary events are held and where readers can meet writers."

For information on activities conducted by Forum Indonesia Membaca for World Book Day 2007 at the National Education Library, visit www.worldbookdayindonesia.blogspot.com. •

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Kristianus 'Atok': Instilling Nonviolence Via Education



uring his childhood, Kristianus "Atok" lived in the village of Setom, Hulu District, Landak Regency, West Kalimantan, where about 70 percent of its 200 population were Madurese.

He was an indigenous Catholic Dayak, yet he mingled with the Muslim Madurese children very well. "Just as with any other kids, I played excitedly with them.

"I had several good Madurese friends of whom I have unforgettable memories," Atok recalled during a recent discussion. It was organized by the International Center for Islam and Pluralism in collaboration with the European Commission and the Forum for Interfaith and Cultural Dialog of Borneo, in Pontianak. It is because of this that Atok felt extremely uncomfortable when the Madurese were forced to leave the village during the escalated tension between Madurese and Dayaks in the 1980s.

There were several physical attacks against the Madurese and their property as they were usually stereotyped as aggressive and economically dominant. The Madurese gradually left the village, sold their land and resettled in Pontianak or other areas. Atok lost his Madurese friends.

But the ethnic unrest, mainly between the Dayaks and Madurese, flared again in 1999 and was recorded as one of the most massive conflicts in the island; it saw roughly 15,000 Madurese flee to Madura.

The conflict started when a group of Madurese stabbed two Dayak teenagers in 1996; this was followed by thousands of Dayaks running amok in the western districts of West Kalimantan, destroying much Madurese business property, including crops and market stalls.

The ethnic tensions are generally attributable to the opening up of the forest for immigration programs, plus logging, mining and trading, which have resulted in increased competition for skilled jobs in the province and have pushed Dayaks to the margins.

However, the image that the indigenous Dayaks are inferior and unskilled began to be portrayed during the colonial period of the Dutch and was intensified during the New Order government with its massive development approach.

Atok joined a non-governmental organization (NGO) that was concerned with the empowerment of Dayaks during his time as a student in the agriculture faculty at the University of Tanjungpura. However, he resigned as he felt uncomfortable with the single-ethnic orientation of the organization.

He completed his master's degree in sociology from the same university, writing a thesis titled Social interaction among the Dayaks and Madurese in Sebangki District.

After the 1999 riot, he and other concerned intellectuals

representing a variety of ethnic groups initiated a civil society community meeting that included student, NGO and women activists.

They set up an NGO, Nusantara Empowerment of People-Forest-Reefs Foundation (YPPN), on August 20, 2000. It was a multiethnic body with the vision of promoting democracy based on wisdom, equality and plurality; Atok was elected as its chairman.

YPPN is currently preoccupied with activities concerning the strengthening of fragmented society. "We shall never be able to preserve our natural resources or make use of them professionally and responsibly if people are fragmented and keep fighting or competing for their share by any means," said Atok.

Collaborating with other institutions and funding agencies such as Frederich Naumann Stiftung, TIFA and Cordaid, YPPN has run a wide range of programs. These include a network for nonviolent community action, a study of traditional land tenure rights and a community seed bank.

Also covered have been multiethnic community facilitation, training for community leaders and for radio coverage of the 2004 general election, joint economic and cultural activities, a kampong library and education that stresses nonviolence.

Asked which program he thought the most rewarding, he answered nonviolence education, which involves 30 senior high schools from three regencies: Landak, Bengkayang and Pontianak.

Activities in the program include camping, a children's jamboree and intercultural visits. He recalled that during the visits some students were asked to stay with families of different ethnicity. "Some Dayak students cried, as they were so terrified that the Madurese would be rude or hurt them."

"But it turned out that the Dayak students and the Madurese families got along together very smoothly during the three-day stay. They shared jokes and often burst into laughter.

"The stereotypes seem to be gradually broken down—it had to start with children because their involvement from a young age has

a long-term impact in the future," said Atok who was born on Aug 28, 1966, and is married to Magdalena. They have three children.

Indeed, Atok's fond childhood memories of good relations with Madurese friends may still linger, but expanding this to wider communities that are dogged with entrenched stereotypes and prejudices requires patience and much hard work by all parties concerned.

"I cannot do it alone," Atok observed. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, July 25, 2006

Yanti Sriyulianti: Promoting Awareness of Education



n 1999, Yanti Sriyulianti she was accepted as a volunteer as a staff in the learning resource division at a private elementary school where her daughter also studied.

"Relations between teachers and parents were conducive, with parents enthusiastically involved in providing alternative solutions to almost every school problem.

"Problems of lack of books, class facilities, laboratorium and parking lot were resolved amicably and effectively," she told The Jakarta Post recently.

However, that did not last long. The new management of the school foundation seemed to begin to see the parents as interfering in school affairs.

No reasonable reasons were actually provided, but "it was enough to make me feel disillusioned of what I had expected to be the nurturing democracy of school," she said.

In fact, many school committees have become a rubber stamp of the school management, both in private and public schools.

Yanti later gathered several concerned families of the school to have regular meetings at the home of one of the school founders, who threw his support behind their efforts.

They discussed a wide range of issues from experience in

educating their children to government education policy. As the gathering grew larger with more families from different schools joining, they named their forum KerLIP (Family Forum Concerned with Education) on Dec. 25, 1999, with Yanti becoming its General Secretary.

KerLIP soon became a critical parent forum that is concerned with the democratization of education. It developed a wide range of activities such as providing financial aid to schools, developing student creativity by holding drawing competition, conducting story-telling training, opening weekend classes for students with disabilities, setting up libraries for low-income families, conducting research of the development of "liberating education"—an education concept that liberates students from rigid and bureaucratic learning atmosphere.

KerLIP implemented the concept in 2001 at Hikmah Pelajar elementary school in Cimahi, West Java.

"Children have special characteristics of being sensitive, curious, creative and imaginative. We should be able to nurture these positive characteristics and making use of them during their learning process," said Yanti, who has now been KerLIP's chairwoman since 2004.

However, present education system prevents students from being creative and imaginative, she said.

"For example, the infamous Natonal Exams (UN) which are the only consideration of whether students pass is unfair, because it overlooks students' learning process during years of learning," she said.

There are only three core subjects being tested. And if a student fails just one of the three subjects, he or she will fail the entire exam and will have to repeat the whole year.

"Do you think that is fair?" she challenged. "How can you force someone who is a genius in Math to be also a genius in English?"

It is because of this that Yanti and his colleagues began helping students who have failed the national exams. In cooperation with LBH Jakarta and other concerned parties, KerLIP conducted various demonstrations and began advocating for the students.

But the challenges are huge and the government refused to bow to the pressure.

Yanti is still optimistic, "We'll continue the fight," she vowed, confident that the public is behind the efforts.

Born on July 10, 1969 in Bandung, Yanti was a pharmacy student at the Faculty of Math and Science at Bandung Institute of Technology. Her own experiences made her determined to make sure that every child's right to decent education is ensured, as guaranteed in the Child Protection Law: "Every child is entitled to earning education and teaching to develop her/his personality as in line with the level of her/his intellectuality and interests."

Yanti has held various positions. She has participated in Education Network for Justice in association with the Asia Pacific Bureau Adult Education (ASPBAE). She has been involved in activities to ensure that particularly marginalized women can enjoy cheap and quality education.

This includes research on privatization on education; analysis on educational budget at national, provincial and local levels, national workshop and a study in West Nusa Tenggara; development of benchmarks of quality education at local levels with a pilot study conducted in Sumatera; and strengthening the national network between working groups that advocate for alternative education.

She was a program manager for the Action and Advocation Program for internally displaced women, especially women in illiteracy, and internally displaced children, disabilities and marginalized children in Aceh Province.

She also designed and developed programs of budgeting of school-based management in a number of schools, such as Darul Hikmah di Cimahi, SD Hikmah Teladan, and three schools in Garut, Tasikmalaya and Ciamis.

KerLIP has also initiated a home-schooling program, which

has gradually mushroomed in Jakarta, Bandung, Medan, Surabaya and Sukabumi.

"Some doubt about the effectiveness of home-schooling, but success stories in many countries such as in the U.S. are evident," Yanti said.

She added that the daughters of Indonesia's high-flying educationalist Kak Seto pursued home-schooling and one of them has already been accepted in a foreign university.

She said that home-schooling is a legal practice as families pursuing home-schooling would just need to report to local Education Office if they would like to receive equalization recognition through special exams.

"One research shows that home-schooling would develop a pattern of family communication that is dynamic and full of love, warmth and liberty for a life-long learning," said Yanti, whose one of her three children is also now pursuing home-schooling.

Asked about the challenges, she said, "Many are still only familiar with conventional education with a class, a blackboard, a teacher, and an often uncompromising curriculum. However, when we feel that our children are trapped in an education bureaucracy that prevents their creativity and liberty, family-based education could serve as an alternative." •

First published by The Jakarta Post, October 26, 2006

Increasing Access to Education Through Internet a Vital Need

ducation Minister Bambang Sudibyo has announced the government's intention to buy the copyrights of school textbooks so they can be downloaded through the Internet free of charge.

The plan is not without reason.

First, there is a severely unequal access to textbooks in many parts of the country due to ineffective distribution. Worse still, the number of available books is not enough to ensure that every student gets a book.

Second, vested and conflicting interests among education stakeholders such as publishers, schools, the bureaucracy, teachers, principals and parents have impeded improvement of education quality.

For example, one study reveals that only 50 percent of textbooks being used in schools meet the required standards. This means inappropriate textbooks are still being marketed by the publishers.

Also, although illegal, many schools still sell textbooks directly to students. A government regulation says textbooks should be used for five years, yet in practice parents have to change the books almost every year. This is not to mention the soaring price of textbooks.

The Internet plan may help resolve textbook problems, as it would bring dynamism to our national book system. But some points need to be considered.

First, the proposed policy should not disturb the existing system that involves writers, publishers and distributors. Second, it may only sound "beautiful as a discourse, but be difficult during the implementation". Third, while the textbooks should be downloaded free of charge and fast, how many of us are computer and Internet literate? Fourth, the kinds of books to be downloaded need to be carefully decided on as this involves various stakeholders.

No wonder the Indonesian Publishers Association (IKAPI) has warned of a school textbook monopoly that might again be held by the government.

Indeed, while the government's intention to widen access to textbooks for students should be warmly welcomed, many technical, legal and pedagogical aspects need to be carefully weighed.

There have been efforts to widen Internet access throughout the country. For example, the Internet Goes to School program launched by state telecommunications company Telkom in 1999 has reached 70,000 schools, or about 30 percent of a total of 219,500 schools and Islamic boarding schools across Indonesia by providing them with relevant training.

Likewise, in order to accelerate Internet penetration, Telkom and state postal company PT Pos Indonesia have agreed to develop community access points, which will be equipped with Internet access, e-business, valued added service and a call center. These services will be installed in 500 post offices in all provinces throughout Indonesia, before being installed in other post offices at the district level.

Furthermore, Telkom, the Education Ministry, Religious Affairs Ministry and Communications and Information Ministry have signed a memorandum of understanding on e-learning programs to provide network infrastructure to high schools throughout Indonesia.

Nevertheless, it remains unclear how the programs have really progressed, with most of them still at the initial stage. One source says that 25 percent (about 14,000) of all high schools have Internet

access, but that means there are still 75 percent which are not yet connected. This does not include junior high and elementary schools.

Information technology expert Roy Survo said during a seminar that only 14.5 million people (6.6 percent of the total population) in the country had access (not necessarily subscribers) to the Internet.

The World Summit on the Information Society set a 2010 deadline for all senior and junior high schools and 2015 for all elementary schools to be equipped with Internet access. If no efforts are planned and carried out, we will all surely be left behind by the international community.

This means we need more effective, systematic and concerted efforts, which can be initiated with a comprehensive survey on Internet awareness among school communities, followed by a massive campaign and efforts to install Internet networks in all schools across the country.

The next step concerns legal aspects. The government has proposed to buy the copyrights of textbooks through a licensing mechanism, both from the writers and the publishers. This should ease IKAPI's fear that the government would again retain monopoly on school textbooks.

The government can buy limited copyrights from writers to display the books through the Internet only, while other derivative forms are still held by the writers. This means the writers can still sell the subsidiary rights to the publishers.

If the copyrights belong to the publishers, it would very much depend on what agreement has previously been reached between the publishers and the writers: a license or assignment agreement. The latter indicates selling of all economic rights.

There is an alternative, however, which emerged during a seminar on this issue in Jakarta recently. Writers can divide their copyrights and sell them to both the government and the publishers through a licensing mechanism. The government can only display the books through the Internet and the publishers can only print the books conventionally.

Still, however, the writers can choose the assignment mechanism.

It must be noted that neither mechanism would steal the moral rights of the writers to have their names mentioned.

Certainly, although Indonesia has enacted the 2002 Copyright Law, the Education Ministry still needs to consult the Justice and Human Rights Ministry to prevent possible legal disputes with both the writers and publishers in the future.

Other unresolved problems include how to prevent people from illegally selling the printed materials downloaded from the Internet. It seems it has to be agreed first whether only certain educational institutions can have access to these textbooks, or whether a subscription system needs to be adopted. Also, what types of books will be made into e-books: educational or general books?

The last but perhaps most profound question concerns the pedagogical aspects when learning is delivered through the Internet. Since it may include web-based teaching materials and hypermedia in general, it is obvious that experts in this area need to be involved in designing an effective e-book and e-learning delivery.

This is not a simple matter, but it could revolutionize our way of learning. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, January 6, 2007

Education Technology Still Top of Ri's List: Govt

ndonesia is striving to maintain its commitment to information and communication technology (ICT) for the education system, a top government official said.

"Seventy percent of our vocational high schools, 30 percent of senior high schools and 20 percent of junior high schools are equipped with computer laboratories," Education Minister Bambang Sudibyo announced at the opening of the sixth International Symposium on Open, Distance and E-Learning in Kuta, Bali, on Wednesday.

The government has also distributed television-based Televisi Edukasi equipment to some 35,198 junior high schools, and has developed thousands of programs comprising on and offline learning activities, TV broadcast materials and audio programs throughout Indonesia.



"Globalization has pushed the development and utilization of information and communication technology in the education sector," Bambang said.

He said experts campaigned for the use of the latest ICT needed to improve equality, quality and management of education, in a vast and archipelagic country like Indonesia.

"Currently, the ICT-based

National Education Network has connected 1,104 spots in

provinces and districts throughout Indonesia," said Lilik Gani, director of the ICT Center for Education (Pustekkom) at the Education Ministry.

He said the government had allocated Rp 500 billion (US\$54.2 million) for ICT development in high schools and junior high schools in 2008.

Despite efforts to improve ICT in the education system, Indonesia still faces problems of low awareness and low Internet penetration due to minimal supporting infrastructure.

The cost of Internet access is higher in Indonesia than in other countries. Research conducted by LIRNEasia in 2006 revealed annual Internet connection costs in Indonesia were up to 48 times higher than in India.

An Indonesian communication provider can charge \$108,000 for an international connection, while in Denmark they charge \$37,000 and India \$30,000.

In Jakarta, deputy chairman of the executive team of the Indonesian National ICT Council, Kemal A. Stamboel, said the government had promised electronic learning would spearhead the education system in the future.



"So the government is working to close the national education gap any way it can, including speeding up the development of the national fiber-optic network," Kemal announced in a seminar on transforming education in Indonesia.

The national fiber-optic network, known as the Palapa Ring project, aims to provide integrated telecommunication infrastructure throughout the country.

Around 35,280 kilometers of undersea cables and 21,807

kilometers of land cables will be installed so the network can reach all 33 provinces, 440 regencies and cities.

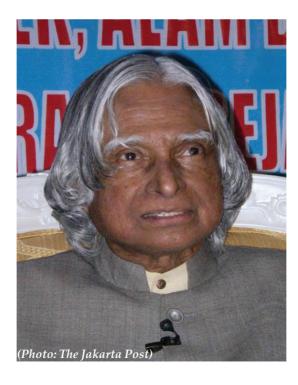
Asked whether Indonesia's workforce is ready to utilize the technologies, Kemal said the latest technology available made it easier for people to work. "Besides, people's ability to adapt to new technology is improving."

"If infrastructure is provided and can be utilized comfortably, I believe it will evolve on its own," he said. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, November 15, 2007

Science, Technology Should Contribute To Society's Development: Kalam

enowned Indian scientist and engineer Dr. Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam, who was also the 11th president of India (2002-2007), was recently in Indonesia to deliver a speech at Indonesia's National Science Congress (KIPNAS) in Jakarta. Kalam, who is described as the "father of the Indian missile", sat down with The Jakarta Post's Alpha Amirrachman to discuss how science can contribute to the development of society. The following are excerpts of the interview:



Question: You have been described as the "father of the Indian missile" program. Do you think India's nuclear program serves as a symbol of India's advancement in science?

Answer: Well, in India we have bio-technology, agricultural science, space science and nuclear science. And putting them up together we can be said to be a nation developing science and technology.

You believe in science for Indian national development and that science development is ideologically free. How do you think science and technology could help bring about world peace and security?

We have six billion people on our planet, but only two billion people who have drinking water. We have a huge problem here of four billion people who desperately need help. Their standard of living should increase, and for that science and technology is a non-linear tool. If you use technology it will grow like that and very fast. I have emphasized the cultivation of scientific temper and entrepreneurial drive. That's why I am saying that science and technology can bring development to us. And science is borderless, any nation can work together.

What is your most significant achievement in your career as a scientist?

When an orthopedic surgeon came for a visit to my laboratory and found that the material we were producing was so light. He asked me to visit the hospital where I saw children dragging their feet around with heavy metallic calipers which weighed three kilograms each. In only three weeks we managed to produce calipers which weighed only 300 grams. No more dragging around a load of three kilograms, the children can now move and play around more freely.

So the light material you produced (for missile) is also used for producing walking equipment for children with disabilities.

Is your country earnestly producing this new kind of orthosis?

Yes, indeed, a number of our industries have started producing the equipment because the material is not only very light but also very cheap.

You have mentioned that Indonesia can benefit from its 13,000 islands for its development? What is your specific idea on that?

Each island can become an economic center. Urban facilities should be provided in rural areas. You are here in Jakarta, but if you go 30 kilometers you would probably find rural areas or villages. You should give psychical and electronic connectivity to them. Build a core competence enhancement for the people, then the economy would come (in the form of) employment, etc. This is what I have suggested in my country that we build around 7,000 PURA (urban facilities in rural areas) clusters. The integrated actions are education that leads to entrepreneurship and employment opportunities, healthcare for all, population growth rates to be within a small band and first-rate infrastructure facilities.

How can regionally-based development help reduce disparities among states in India? How do you think this can be adapted in Indonesia?

In India, for example, the whole southern states now are having the rainy season, while the northern states have winter. In southern states they have unique materials available; we can process the materials and make a product, so southern states can become agricultural centers. And the regionally based management would bring the core competence together and as a result prosperity would come very fast.

For example, a number of states now have hydropower where we can connect all power generators and have a common grid and send it to the whole country.

Therefore, regionally based development can help develop

the nation faster. I believe the physical, electronic and knowledge connectivities of 7,000 PURA clusters will bring about development for the region as a whole. In Indonesia, of course, this would depend on the political (will), the parliament here would need to see if this can be done.

What do you think our nation should do to encourage youth to become passionate about science?

This should be discussed in your parliament too because it is a political decision where you put priority and the availability of the money. In my country, by funding technology we can grow faster, like in agriculture we supported agricultural science. And today we have communications satellites because we gave priority to the space program.

Similarly in information and communication technology, people are coming in a big way. Education institutions have been reinforced. This all gives feedback to science. What is important is that the youth should dream and dream, transform their dreams into thoughts and transform their thoughts into action. And the youth should develop righteousness in their heart, which in my experience, can be built by three people: father, mother and primary school teacher.

You have been campaigning for the use of open-source software; how is it progressing in India?

Many of us are using open-source software in our industry and many applications are also used in the academic world.

Since you are a Muslim scientist who grew up in a middleclass family and have excelled in majority Hindu India, do you think other members of minority groups also have the same opportunities to develop themselves and to contribute to the development of the nation, and that their rights are fully protected?

In our constitution we have fundamental rights of equality and freedom. No discrimination for all Indian people and opportunities are wide open. For example, in India Muslims constitute 15 percent (of the population), Christians 3 to 4 percent of the whole population, and others.

We are a nation of multi-cultures, religions (multireligious) and languages. Very similar to your country which is also multi-cultural and has multi languages, and with a large number of people and so many islands you actually have more challenges.

What is it that you think you haven't achieved in your career?

Billions of people should smile a long way, and I still have to work on that.

First published by The Jakarta Post, November 15, 2007

Paulina Pannen: ICT Enables Open and Distance Learning

he National Education Ministry's ICT Center of Education (Pustekkom) conducted the 6th International Symposium on Open, Distance and E-Learning (ISODEL 2007) from Nov. 13-15 in Kuta, Bali. The Jakarta Post's contributing writer Alpha Amirrachman spoke with the director of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Open Learning Center (SEAMOLEC) and Indonesia Open University professor, Paulina Pannen, about how information and communication technology (ICT) has increasingly become a facilitator for open and distance learning.



Question: What is the difference between open and distance learning and conventional learning?

Answer: Both have the same principles. The difference is that the educational process in open and distance learning is mediated...

However, one has to ensure that the students really learn what is provided in the module or website... One needs to be careful also not to create students' dependency on the tutors so as not to lose the essence of open and distance learning. We also need to be consistent in quality control.

How is open and distance learning developing in Southeast Asia and Indonesia?

The development of open and distance learning both regionally and nationally has progressed significantly. However, what is definite is the increased role of ICT, which has become an inevitable "enabler" and accelerator of open and distance learning.

How is the cooperation between SEAMOLEC and open universities in Southeast Asian countries?

It has increased tremendously, not only with open universities but now also with the education ministries of respective countries. Governments have started to realize that open and distance learning could contribute to resolving some problems in their education system, such as by widening access to education for everyone...

Why is SEAMOLEC headquartered in Jakarta?

Because it was originally initiated in 1997 by then Indonesian education minister Wardiman Djojonegoro. Wardiman said that the Indonesia Open University was already classified as a "mega university" (over 100,000 students). At that time, the number of students enrolled at the Indonesia Open University had reached 400,000.

Vast, archipelagic Indonesia also has a very unique geographical condition, which should invite specific studies into a variety of models of open and distance learning. For example, Java is the most populated island with ample resources but with a flat surface, while the Riau islands consist of small, separate islands. Nusa Tenggara and the Maluku islands also have distinct characteristics.

...The treatment should be different, as there should not be a one-size-fits-all model for these areas.

How many models has SEAMOLEC developed so far?

We now have three models of open and distance learning. The first is radio-based education, which has been developed by Pustekkom. The second is print-based learning material for open junior high schools and universities. The third is multimedia-based (website, video conferencing, audio-visual and print) that has been used for elementary school teacher training programs (PGSD) by the Directorate General of Higher Education.

Since there is still low Internet penetration, will only people in urban areas benefit from ICT-based education?

I don't think so, because I believe electronic gadgets are becoming less and less expensive. For example, mobile phones are now very cheap that you can get one only for Rp 200,000; 3G is still expensive, but I think the price will go down soon. Also Internet access via PDAs is still a luxury, but I believe it is going to be affordable, too.

...Even people at the top of a mountain now have mobile phones, which was unthinkable in the past. ICT cannot be regarded only as a set of computers, but communication technology that can be used to enable the learning process.

But isn't Internet connection still very expensive in Indonesia, higher than any other country?

...I do hope that there will be change. It needs tremendous commitment from the highest level if you really want e-learning to proceed. However, (commitment) is needed not only from the government, but also from the private sector. For example, CSR in every company can be very advantageous for the development of ICT-based education, particularly in (providing) Internet connection. Education has expenses, but the users don't necessarily need to be burdened with them; other parties can help.

How can we encourage companies to support ICT-based education through their CSR?

We have actually started cooperating with the CSR of some companies. For example, we have forged cooperation with Deutsche Bank; we have started to cover Aceh by providing teachers there with training on interactive teaching. All of these are then uploaded in the website database. Teachers have access to this resource material, which has also attracted other people in Southeast Asia to take advantage of this.

We have also started cooperation with the Sampoerna Foundation in the form of ICT-based teacher support services in remote areas. We hope other companies will follow suit.

How does SEAMOLEC provide service to regional countries when it has no branches there?

We have no branches in other countries but we have connections and cooperation... All education ministers in Southeast Asia are members of SEAMOLEC.

Of course, there are still problems. For example, we have not been able to seal cooperation with Myanmar because of the political situation there. ...Also with Timor Leste, we have a good contact with its education minister, but we are still unable to initiate any program.

However, this year the Asia-Pacific Center of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU) is collaborating with SEAMOLEC on situation analysis for e-learning system for multicultural education in ASEAN, which is part of a three-year project supported by the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development of the Republic of Korea. The situation

analysis will be used as the basis for developing multimedia and/ or ICT-based education materials for teachers and schoolchildren in 2008.

Does SEAMOLEC also urge companies in those countries to optimize their CSR in supporting ICT-based open and distance learning?

Yes. For example, in Vietnam we persuaded Microsoft to contribute to the development of e-learning in the country. The cooperation has been running for three years; also with Intel in Cambodia.

What is the biggest challenge in running open and distance learning?

The biggest challenge is building people's confidence. Some still express doubt that open and distance learning is a form of education. We have to explain to the people that there is no difference in terms of quality between open and distance learning and conventional learning.

Nevertheless, thanks to ICT—it is like a new dress—people have started to again pay attention to open and distance learning.

For more information on SEAMOLEC, visit www.seamolec. org. \bullet

First published by The Jakarta Post, November 15, 2007

Inclusive Education is 'The Key' To a More Democratic Society

demonstrated the computer skills of his visually impaired colleagues at an event at the Presidential Palace on Dec. 6, marking the International Day for Persons with Disabilities. The foundation is an NGO that aims to provide services to people with visual impairment through educational programs. It also is a resource center for regular schools with inclusive education. Bambang, who is also visually impaired, met with *The Jakarta Post's* contributor Alpha Amirrachman to talk about the current state's policies for people with disabilities, and inclusive education which he said could enable them to enjoy equal participation in society.

Question: How would you describe the present government's handling of people with disabilities?

Answer: In the past I faced difficulties when I applied for work as a teacher, due to explicit discriminatory regulations that stipulated that teachers must not have disabilities.

In the education sector students with disabilities have been segregated into exclusive schools, which were only available in selected locations, but I think the situation has been gradually improving.

This can be seen, for example, in the 1997 law for people with disabilities and the 2003 national education law.

The regulation for disabled people stipulates that every companies' workforce must comprise at least 1 percent persons with disabilities. The education law states that people with mental and physical disabilities are entitled to special education, but "special education" can still be interpreted as a segregated education (only for students with disabilities), which effectively separates them from the rest of society.

Under the 2005 regulation on national education standards, however, the government stated the need for specialized teachers in inclusive education, to further integrate disabled persons into the education system. It states that every school with an inclusive education program should have specialized teachers with required competence to handle students with disabilities.

Also the decree made by the director general of elementary and secondary education at the National Education Ministry urged schools to provide inclusive education programs where disabled students require them.

How is all this translated into practice?

The 1 percent quota of staff dedicated for people with disabilities has yet to be completely put into practice.

There are also inadequate resources for schools to effectively adopt the inclusive education policies. Schools still think it would burden them to provide special facilities for students with disabilities.

I believe local administrations should allocate a special budget for schools with an inclusive education policy.



(Photo: The Jakarta Post)

When I was invited to give advice on the formulation of Jakarta's gubernatorial regulation on inclusive education, I

managed to insert a clause that schools with inclusive education programs should receive "guidance" from local authorities—this should also be interpreted as financial assistance, and I hope that all local administrations throughout the country would follow suit.

But there have also been positive signs, with the Education Ministry now providing a grant to the Mitra Netra Foundation, which has provides resources for people with disabilities.

Regular schools can ask for the provision of special teachers and learning resources from us, or from special schools for students with disabilities.

Why do you think inclusive education is better for people with disabilities? Don't these people need special and different treatment?

I'm not saying special schools are unnecessary. Segregated education is still important for certain people who require special treatment, but many students with disabilities are also capable and can learn alongside students at conventional schools and should be socializing with other members of society.

Students can learn to interact with each other and respect their differences from an early age.

I think this could be a key to make our society adopt a more democratic outlook. It is unfortunate that there are still those who believe people with disabilities cannot be productive, which is basically discrimination—This is a serious threat to inclusive education.

Because of this, we need clear, consistent policies and regulations.

What needs to be improved in inclusive education is: to increase the number and equal distribution of quality resource centers across the country; the provision of a clear status for special education teachers and their chosen career path; designing an effective evaluation system; the provision of an operational budget for resource centers and campaigns; and dissemination of

information on policies for regular schools in remote areas, with involvement from local authorities which can accommodate the specific needs of each region.

What do you think is the biggest challenge in dealing with the issue?

I think the biggest challenge is to shift the paradigm within our society that discriminates against people with disabilities, seeing them only as a burden.

We also need to change our perception such that people like us aren't just seen as persons who need special treatment and charity, but as people who can contribute to the betterment of society.

In the past, because of discrimination and prejudice we were never asked to get involved in policy making.

Since this paradigm is difficult to dislodge, we are often forced to make compromises. We have struggled to influence policy makers but what we may perceive as ideal is often hard for others to accept, for a number of reasons, including that we are a poor country and there are many other areas which need immediate attention.

The government has definitely started to include us in its policies, and have increasingly shown to understand that we know exactly what we need.

The recent visit made by Bank Indonesia personnel to Mitra Netra for advice on the production of bills especially designed for people with visual impairment is a good example. Although its results were not entirely satisfactory, because we were not consulted from the outset, it is still an indication of a positive change.

How do you think information and communications technology (ICT) can help to empower people with disabilities?

The development of ICT has been amazing and has enabled people, particularly those with disabilities, to learn new skills.

ICT has proven to be a very useful tool to enhance skills and

knowledge, but we need to catch up with developments in this field, otherwise we will be left behind.

Mitra Netra Foundation has produced special software called the Mitra Netra Braille Converter (MBC), the Mitra Netra Electronic Dictionary (MELDICT) and Tactile Graphic Software.

We also produce digital talking books which are cheap and efficient—users can easily navigate to pages or chapters.

Each year we publish 125 different Braille-based titles and the same number of digital talking books.

Managed by the Indonesian E-Braille Community (KEBI), the database can also be accessed online by the blind, who use special screen reader software.

The screen readers and Braille display software must be imported and are therefore expensive. As yet we have been unable to produce an Indonesian version ... so we would like to see experts help us invent them.

There are also other obstacles; the high cost of Internet connections, the lack of Internet access in many schools and limited supporting government regulations. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, December 24, 2007

Freedom to Learn needs More than Teacher

orld Bank vice president for East Asia and Pacific Victoria Kwakwa was more than correct when underlining the importance of ASEAN in investing in people as key to better development (*The Jakarta Post*, Sept. 10).

She wrote that while ASEAN "as a whole has been a standout success story", "[y]et on average, education, skill development and health indicators are below what is expected given ASEAN's in-come levels. There are also wide disparities in life expectancy, job productivity and education quality across the region".

This high enthusiasm in investing in people was also palpable among members countries of the Southeast Asian Minister of Education Organizations (SEAMEO), which recently gathered in Kuala Lumpur to discuss strategic plans for years ahead. The conference saw a handover of the SEAMEO presidency from Indonesian education minister Muhadjir Effendy to Malaysian education minister Maszlee Malik, who will lead the organization from this year to 2021.

The festive handover was filled with the spirit of siblinghood, but the consciousness of hard-hitting reality ahead soon tainted the jovial mood.

Maszlee has a staggering task ahead as the competitiveness of the region is still low and the disparities and inequalities of education in the region are troublesome.

The IMD World Digital Competitiveness Ranking 2018 study shows the disconsolate picture that most countries in Southeast Asia have witnessed a relative drop in the ranking of overall and digital competitiveness.

Worse, dropping three ranks to 62nd in the overall digital ranking, Indonesia is the lowest ranking country in the region.

With a total population of 641.77 million and a growing middle class, the region is a money spinning market to tap for big educational digital industries such as those from United States and China. Nevertheless, being digitally uncompetitive will only make the population of Southeast Asia a mere captive market.

And the disparity and inequalities exist not only between less developing and more developing countries but also within the countries in a form of rural-urban areas and public-private education institutions or among provinces of the countries.

There are also gender and socioeconomic conditions that result in disparities in the delivery of quality learning opportunities.

For example, the rate of female enrollment in upper secondary education is relatively lower than that of male enrollment in Vietnam. Ethnic minority 'school girls are considered the most disadvantaged in upper secondary education.

In Indonesia, educational disparities are obvious across geographical areas, urban and rural, between the western and eastern part of Indonesia and among groups of people with varying in comes and gender.

President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's determination to focus on the development of human resources in his second term is promising, though concrete steps need a reality check.

In Malaysia, a main focus is already in achievement gaps, since subject matters like English, science and mathematics all emphasize the need to narrow the gaps between urban and rural students.

"We should embrace the spirit of regionalism and the spirit of one big Asian family [...] we should work together based on our strengths [...], "Maszlee said in his speech.

SEAMEO, established in 1965, two years before ASEAN, can be effectively treated as a focus entry of education, as it supervises 26 educational centers with certain expertise across Southeast Asian countries.

However, the collaboration should depart from a typical "Asian" way, where polite words are more palpable than concrete work.

First, the leadership of every party in the collaboration needs to be deeply involved and continually supportive of successful results. Every education minister should be committed to translating decisions into policy.

Second, for effective decision-making, regional cooperation needs to carefully balance the needs of the multiple units of the involved parties through wide consultancy with the relevant units of respective education ministries. And third, both SEAMEO and ASEAN should focus on common interests.

The seven priorities of SEAMEO areas are achieving universal early childhood care and education, addressing barriers to inclusion, resiliency in the face of emergencies, promoting technical and vocational education and training, revitalizing teacher education, harmonizing higher education and research and adopting a 21st century curriculum.

The eight subgoals of ASEAN's work plan include ASEAN awareness, quality and access to basic education, information and communication technology CCT) in education, technical and vocational education and training; and lifelong learning, education for sustainable development, higher education quality assurance, university-industry partnership and capacity building for teachers and community.

Certainly, there are interspersed points that can be worked out. For example, addressing barriers to inclusion can be addressed with the use of ICT in education.

Last, aside from public funding that the organizations receive from respective governments, the collaborative efforts should also devise an "entrepreneurial mechanism" by involving private sectors to generate more support for their agreed agenda, thus delivering more to the people of the region.

The involved parties should be able to anticipate and act

swiftly upon any emerging development bypassing the sometimes. sluggish. government bureaucracy if necessary, and collaborate more prolifically with more partners to unleash the very potential of this rich but still sleepy region. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, January 16, 2019

Can Al Help Digital Divide in Southeast Asia?

rtificial Intelligence (AI) has now inevitably become a flourishing technological sphere capable of amending every aspect of our social interaction. It is an area of computer science that stresses the construction of intelligent machines that labor and react almost like humans, particularly after recent breakthroughs dealing with the use of big data, economic access, to computing power and advances in machine learning.

It is "machine with minds", according to John Haugheland in 1985, or "the study of computations that make it possible to perceive, reason, and act", as Patrick Winston wrote in 1992. AI has been implanted in our mobile phones, as they are now able to have "intimate" conversations with us, answer our questions and detect and even offer our personal preferences.

In education, AI has also been recommended to help attain the fourth Sustainable Development Goal, which is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Just recently UNESCO conducted a global conference on Al in Paris, where theorists, practitioners and policymakers gathered to discuss and debate the contribution of AI to education.

The conference discussed how AI has started creating new teaching and learning solutions that are being tested in various settings. The two prominent global hubs of AI development are the United States, which has invented various applications, and China, which is still a distant second but catching up fast. China has 730 million internet users and the government has an ambition to turn the country into the largest pole of AI development by

2030 by relying on private pillars. A private digital education company Huijang is developing a digital platform, Liulushuo, which teaches English to 600,000 students with the participation of a single teacher.

In Latin America, a Uruguayan state agency introduced an online adaptive learning solution called a "mathematics adaptive platform" developed by German company Bettermarks. The content has been adapted to the national curriculum and it is a tool that provides personalized feedback in accordance to student experiences.

Nevertheless, Al requires advanced infrastructures and an environment of flourishing innovators. How about Southeast Asian countries?

During a recent workshop on school borders in Vientiane, for example, most teachers were amazed when the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organizations Regional Open Learning Center (SEAMOLEC) presenting their Innovation of Educational Resources for Remote Area, but teachers from the older generations seemed reluctant to pursue any further workshops about information and communication technology (ICT) until the committee reminded them of the importance for all teachers to have at least digital awareness, Singapore has notably made the greatest advances in Al development and there are promising signs in countries like Malaysia and Vietnam. Indonesia has the potential, but much needs to be fixed.

Out of 262 million people, 143 million or 55 percent of the Indonesian population, are internet users, but social and digital divides still exist. According to the 2017 data of the Indonesian Internet Providers Association (APIID), internet penetration is 58 percent in Java, 19 percent in Sumatra, 7.97 percent in Kalimantan, 6.73 percent in Sulawesi, 5.63 percent in Bali-Nusa and only 2.49 percent in Maluku-Papua. In terms of age, 4.24 percent of internet users are above 54 years old, 29.55 percent are 35 to \$4 years old, 49.52 percent are 19 to 34 years old and 16.68 percent are 13 to

18 years old. Also, 89.35 percent of the platforms being used by Indonesians are social media platforms for chatting, as compared to 7.39 percent for banking.

Worse, Al planted in mobile phones, for example, tends to be used mainly for consumptive behavior. This means, aside from digital divide, even the awareness to use digital technology, let alone Al, in a more productive way still seems far reaching.

Several efforts have been made. Education and Culture Minister Muhadjir Effendy introduced computer-based tests for national final exams. SEAMOLEC has also been working closely with the ministry's Center for Technology and Communication to implant Al in the English version of the latter's Rumah Belajar online learning platform and to develop Indonesia's Open Educational Resources hub as mandated by UNESCO.

Furthermore, SEAMOLEC has initiated online entrepreneurship courses for vocational students and a SeaCreativeCamp competition for Southeast Asian students to encourage them to produce ICT innovations such as on the internet of things, augmented reality, software programming and much more. Until now, 10,208 students and teachers have taken part in the competition, resulting in 344 projects.

With its huge population, Indonesia has a massive opportunity to make full use of AI for educational and productive activities, which would catapult Indonesia's intellectual role, ICT standing and economic performance in the region.

This can be done in three ways: improve the advancement of ICT infrastructure across the country, pursue Al development and its research to be used extensively in the education sector and encourage students and teachers to be more ICT-based innovative with an entrepreneurial spirit. This would also help reduce the digital gap and simultaneously ignite productive economic engines.

In this case, Indonesian government intervention involving pertinent stakeholders is needed. Otherwise, people would miss

the golden opportunity to take part in an intellectually innovative and productive endeavor in this almost unlimited digital world and end up merely as a consumptive, uncreative segment of the Southeast Asian population. •

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Big Data and the Thorn of **Ethical Implications**

hen an information and communications technology (ICT) company approached a big private organization in Indonesia to offer the use of an online learning application for the organization's thousands of schools and connect them throughout the country, some of the board members of the organization expressed curiosity about where the company would store the immense data of the schools.

As the company said the data would be digitally stored in the cloud, the board members flatly rejected the idea, as they feared the data, which includes personal data of teachers, students and even parents, could be misused.

They said they would like the big data of their schools to be stored on a server located in the organization's compound. Also, during a recent workshop on big data in Jakarta, at least three people raised concerns of privacy and ethics related to the use of private data.

Indeed, having our data incongruously exposed could lead to unintended or even harmful consequences.

We know that criminals track our status on social media to determine when they would break into our house. We've heard about Mark Zuckerberg being 'questioned by the United States Congress about accusations of Facebook giving social engineering firm illicit access to the personal details of social media users.

We also heard about Cambridge Analytica being suspected of interfering in elections on a number of continents.

But big data improves the way governments run their day-today work, enabling them to meet certain needs more efficiently and precisely. For example, in Indonesia, the Defense Ministry, the Education and Culture Ministry, the Research, Technology and Higher Education Ministry and the Finance Ministry (particularly the Tax Office) have specifically developed and utilized big data as a foundation for good governance.

Big data, for example, provides the Education and Culture Ministry with almost real-time information about registered schools, including their teachers and students, across the country. With the spirit of public accountability, governments tend to handle their big date with care, although there is always a risk of other parties misusing sensitive data.

Big data provides industries with the ability to analyze markets in near real time to predict and generate more profits. For instance, Indonesian processed milk and butter producer PT Indolakto has undergone digital transformation by developing automatic process control and real-time android apps for the sales team. The initiative was aimed at multiplying profit.

With the growth of the Internet of Things, technologies like speed monitors in cars also provide valuable data for insurance companies as well as carmakers. However, such things can also go too far. A store in Guatemala, for example, can track those who signed up for its app then they turn up in a rival store in the same mall without the consumer's knowledge.

Hence, the increased use of big data has been criticized as potentially discriminatory, while creating distorted power relations between data owners and users. Some have begun to realize the risk of data exposure, but the explosive, frantic use of social media seems to distract many people from this peril.

Big data is somehow still regarded as ethically neutral, or providing benefits that outweigh the unintended impacts.

Referring to the first issue raised in this article, one executive of the ICT 'company suggested that primary and sensitive data of the schools could be stored on a special server in a compound belonging to the organization, while the secondary data could be stored on the ICT company's servers or the cloud.

Be that as it may, it is inadequate.

A determined effort is needed to thoroughly protect personal and private information collected in very large datasets. Several countries have moved forward to enact special laws with severe legal consequences.

The European Union, for example, voted in favor of enacting the General Data Protection Regulation in 2016, which provides guidelines for the 28 member nations. Facebook has already found itself in the hot seat over legal compliance.

Malaysia enacted the Personal Data Protection Act in 2010. In Singapore, personal data is protected under the Personal Data Protection Act 2012. The Philippines enacted the Data Privacy Act of 2012 and Thailand's Personal Data Protection Act was just endorsed this year.

What about Indonesia?

The collection of personal data is merely regulated by Communications and Information Ministerial Regulation No. 20/2016, which is regarded insufficient to deal with the growing use of digital personal data both in the government and private sector.

The ministry has submitted a more comprehensive bill to the House of Representatives, but deliberation on the draft was postponed due to the presidential and legislative elections in April this year. Once everything is settled and new lawmakers inaugurated, the House must prioritize the deliberation of the bill, as it is a constitutional mandate to safeguard citizens' fundamental rights.

Aside from legal protection, people also need to be aware of the need to take action themselves to protect their personal data, Educating people on this issue is the task of all stakeholders, including the government and private sector, in particular ICT companies. If not, once the personal data is stolen or misused, people and society at large might have to suffer not only a loss, but also 'unbearable consequences. •

School Zoning and the Break from Elitist Mentality

early two years ago, it took Abdul half an hour to reach his school in Depok, West Java, on a bicycle. He was so exhausted one day that sweat drenched his exam sheets. However, things improved when the government implemented a school zoning policy where schools must prioritize children living nearby. Abdul enrolled at a senior high school near his house that took him only 10 minutes by public transportation to reach,

The zoning system was intended to accommodate all children living near schools, regardless of their social and academic status. Education and Culture Minister Muhadjir Effendy expressed hope that schools would accommodate all school-age children in their respective zones.

Student admissions are carried out through three channels, namely the zoning channel (minimum quota of 90 percent), achievement channel (maximum. quota of 5 percent) and transfer students (maximum quota of 5 percent). The main consideration of the new enrolment system is not academic achievement but the domicile of the students.

Since 2016, the education ministry has conducted intensive national consultative meetings with regional education offices to ensure they conduct further consultative meetings with the wider public in their respective regions.

However, student admission processes have caused heated controversy, as they are intimately related to the school zoning system, in which constraints and challenges vary in each region.

Parents in various areas have lodged complaints with schools and authorities, saying that their children with high academic achievement had failed to gain admission to "popular schools"

because they had been "beaten" by other children with low academic qualifications that lived near the school.

While still strongly maintaining the policy, the minister has shown flexibility by accommodating the complaints by slightly increasing the quota of the achievement channel to 15 percent this year.

With the remaining gap in quality among provinces and regencies, and even among public schools in one regency or municipality, the challenges of school zoning are understandable.

However, the ministry has argued that school zoning will be referred to as a blueprint by the ministry to identify problems in education and pressure all stakeholders, particularly local governments, to pay attention to the improvement of all schools, not only popular and elite public schools.

This should include improving educational facilities and infrastructure, and improving the competency of all teachers, particularly in less popular schools. According to the ministry, 62.62 percent or Rp 208.38 trillion (US\$14.72 billion) of the total education budget of Rp 492.46 trillion has been shifted to the local governments.

Learning from other countries, school zoning has always been an ongoing process of perfection and improvement, taking into consideration various variables and conditions along with regular public debate.

In Malaysia, registered preschools are obliged to follow zoning regulations and must comply with regulations such as fire hazard assessment and health screening. Dense residential areas usually house many preschools.

In Singapore, the guaranteed equity with school zoning has long ceased to be an issue. The more pertinent issue has been traffic safety in school zones. Cars are required to slow down to 40 kilometers per hour during certain hours around school zones and motorists must signal more visibly with flashing lights.

In Australia, a primary school zone is an area from which the school recruits its core intake of students. Acceptance into

a particular primary school is due to its capacity, and school principals during parental meetings can advise if they have available rooms for other candidate students. In France, school zoning allowed the government to plan the construction of new schools in accordance with the demographic changes. It was designed to embrace social diversity as all students living in the area should enroll in their zoned schools.

Nevertheless, zones had gradually differentiated from each other. The zones defined by the education ministry were adjusted to the profile of students along with input from parents.

Canada has adopted mixed-schooling systems across different cities. Elementary students in Toronto are required to attend their local schools, while children in Edmonton and Vancouver have choices to a certain extent.

Public debate has always emerged between those who support school zoning and school choice, and the government is often forced to strike a balance between the two camps.

What can be learned is that policy adoption and public debate is justifiable before, during and after policy implementation, particularly in the education sector, where the interests of the wider public are crucially at stake.

However, several countries with sound education policies have clearly adopted school zoning with its variations.

The principle of fairness and equity is embedded in the school zoning system, as Indonesia needs to break from the mentality of elite and popular schools, which accommodates only the haves and the bright, and give more room to disadvantaged students to be able to benefit from quality public schools.

The ultimate success of every public school should be to ensure that all its students, regardless of their academic and social backgrounds, excel both intellectually and socially to reach their fullest potential as a human being. •

Lesson from West Java: Digitalizing Learning

n recent years, the affordability of rapidly progressing digital technology has gradually narrowed the gap between the haves and have-nots, and enabled millions of young people in developed and developing countries to benefit from the digital world.

Digitalization has likewise profoundly transformed education. Though digital divide still exists and much needs to be done to make sure no one is left out, digitalization is inescapable in education for several reasons.

First, digitalization provides more room for customization. Second, it saves time and energy. Third, it forces schools to adapt to technology—with numerous digital applications that can make subjects like mathematics a fun but still meaningful learning experience for students, schools have no choice but to be adaptable. Fourth, it provides a greater practical approach and flexibility.

Digitalization of education helps widen access to education

A major digital education project called ProFuturo, for example, is bringing high quality basic education to 2 million children and teens in Africa and Latin America, and will soon expand to Asia, reaching at least 10 million children in the coming years.

The Indonesian government is also facilitating the digitalization of nonformal education sector. As many as 17,000 nonformal courses have begun to gradually develop massive open online courses, making them available to wider societies.

In West Java, open and distance learning with the help of information and communications technology (CT) has increased the school enrolment rate from 68.76 percent in 2016 to 72.35 percent in 2017 and 81.25 percent in 2018. The distance-learning program in the province has been designed to employ a hybrid or blended mode of ICT-based open and distance learning.

This method is implemented in two types of schools, namely regular senior high schools and senior vocational high schools, with learning centers as an integral part in both. The main difference is that the vocational type provides industries as learning centers, so that it can attract young workers to pursue secondary education without leaving their current jobs.

The program allows a learner to study by using an independent learning system that cooperates with industry, in a combination of distance learning using internet networks and face-to-face learning, and practice with business or industry players.

In a wider scope, this program. is expected to reduce unskilled workers and improve their working skills and capabilities, as well as provide the widest possible learning opportunities to those who are unable to attend regular high school.

As many as 492 schools (311 senior high schools and 181 vocational high schools) in 2017 and 513 schools (325 senior high schools and 108 vocational high schools) in 2018 were involved as "main schools", which provide open and distance learning to 1,257 learning centers for senior high school students and 1,334 industries as learning centers for vocational high school students.

Altogether, 31,304 students at senior high schools and 11,802 students at vocational high schools were involved and registered.

The hybrid mode allows participants to study while not leaving work. The face-to-face tutorials (synchronous) can help students learn better and tutorial sessions are also an effective way to interact, while face-to-face online tutorials (asynchronous) are facilitated through a learning management system (LMS).

The LMS provides a powerful set of features to create and manage courses, as well as track student attendance and performance. The expectation for the utilization of LMS is that students will become more familiar with online learning activities as a medium that is detrimental when students are not in a face-to-face situation.

The face-to-face approach is implemented during, the practice and practicum session assisted and facilitated by tutors. The webbased course becomes the main delivery mode and is enhanced and blended with face-to-face and video conference components. This type of delivery is implemented during the independent study period.

Video conferences are mainly for coordination among teachers and tutors, and for discussion of learning problem' that students might encounter during independent learning.

In several main schools, the program has run relatively well. For instance, one vocational high school in Pangandaran regency, West Java, with a competency focus in agribusiness and fisheries collaborated with a tuna export company. In one academic year, participants studied at the company for six months, and another six months through a blended learning mode at the main school or learning center.

Another high school in Padalarang, also in West Java, with a competency focus in agribusiness and horticulture collaborated with a farmers' association, allowing participating students, to experience actual work on the field, while they learned relevant theories online and offline at the learning center.

However, challenges persist. Many schools and learning centers, particularly in rural areas, are still grappling with the new learning environment. ICT-based virtual classrooms are 'a totally new learning experience for both teachers and students.

Online learning also demands much time and intensive work, thus time management and self-discipline matter. In some cases, students found themselves excited and highly motivated at first, but later become disillusioned as the workload becoming overwhelming.

Another challenge-is to ensure that the system really taps, into students' potential and that proper teaching and learning takes place to reach quality standard.

The fact that this has helped increase access to education and catapulted the school enrollment rate is undoubtedly a major breakthrough. Moreover, this is in line with President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's aim to concentrate on human resources development in his second term of office.

However, unremitting improvement to blended learning with more effective interaction to heighten students' skills and knowledge and enrich their social experience is needed to ensure that ICT-based open and distance learning results in the expected outcome. •

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Vocational Education Needs Bold Reform

est Java Governor Ridwan Kamil was unable to hide his disappointment over the province's high unemployment rate. In fact, the latest figures from Statistics Indonesia (BOS) showed that open unemployment in the province had declined from 8.16 percent in 2018 to 7.73 percent in 2019, primarily due to the affirmative measures of the West Java education office; yet it was still the highest among other provinces.

More disappointingly, many of the unemployed are graduates of vocational schools, which are supposed to produce highly skilled workers. What went wrong?

In the last several years, the country has seen an uncontrolled explosion of private vocational schools, for which the provincial administration had failed to carry out a proper feasibility study regarding demand and better quality schools that met at least the minimum educational standards.

To date, the country has 10,576 private vocational schools and 3,581 public vocational schools, but fewer students attend private vocational schools. One private vocational school even had only 50 enrolled students. The figures point to how the private sector indiscriminately built numerous vocational schools only to lure students, taking both the students' money and the government subsidy, but failed to deliver high quality teaching and produce a large number of skilled graduates to be absorbed by industries.

In response, the central government has launched a revitalization program to fix the acute problems in vocational education by, among other measures, mapping the needs of industries, facilitating productive rapport between vocational

schools and relevant industries, providing additional training to teachers and empowering selected vocational schools. It is also overhauling education facilities like laboratories, primarily at vocational schools that provide engineering, tourism, maritime, creative industry and agribusiness programs.

In addition, the government has been improving its teaching factory program along three lines. First, the program is offered on campus as part of the academic system. Second, the program is offered as an off-campus practicum for students and is not part of the academic system. Third, the program can be offered as a special practicum, either on- or off-campus.

As a result, 655 schools have been readjusted to align with the needs of related industries, 3,830 teachers have been trained to develop competence exams and 2,880 teachers have been trained as competence' certification assessors. Finally, 1,000 students have enrolled in vocational competence certification programs.

Selected vocational schools have also established different forms of collaboration with relevant companies, such as L'Oreal, Yamaha, Huwae, MedcoEnergi, Kubota, Daihatsu, Casio and Adira Finance.

But this is still not enough. With over 5 million students enrolled at 14,157 private and public vocational high schools amid the rapidly changing industrial landscape, it is almost impossible to implement sweeping and significant reform without across-the-board, consistent measures.

Several bold steps must be taken to ensure the continued productivity of vocational schools.

First, decisive action is needed to deal with underperforming vocational schools. Such schools should be merged or closed, particularly profit-oriented private schools that are lagging behind other vocational schools.

It is understandable that governor Ridwan wants a thorough evaluation of vocational schools in his province, and fewer schools would mean less difficulty in gearing them toward reform.

Second, reciprocal partnerships with industries should incorporate far-reaching curricular development, well planned job recruitment and regular consultative meetings every semester at the very least. The course of study, curriculum and practicum facilities should be designed and equipped to align with industry demand.

Third, tighten interministerial synergy between the Education and Culture Ministry and the manpower, industry, higher education and research ministries to address substantive matters in tackling the problems and enhancing the opportunities of vocational education. For example, teacher training colleges should have well-structured programs that produce good teachers. Furthermore, a tax incentive could be offered to attract more corporate involvement in the revitalization program.

And all parties should work hand-in-hand and harder toward streamlined job absorption. Ideally, at least 60 percent of vocational school students should be absorbed: immediately upon graduation, and close to 100 percent three to Six months after they graduate.

Fourth, collaboration with foreign parties should focus not only on traditional Western vocational education in Germany or

Switzerland, and should also look East. Vocational education that uses cutting-edge technology has been progressing impressively in money-surplus China and South Korea.

Fifth, more efficient and personalized learning should be delivered effectively through the use of advanced technology to address the large number of students and the shortage of competent teachers and instructors. For example, augmented reality and virtual reality—which are becoming more affordable and accessible—can be used to introduce practicums before students advance to hand on work. This will help meet demands that courses should combine 60 percent practice and 40 percent theory.

Lastly, vocational schools should not only focus on regular competencies in the current market that might soon become outdated, but also stay-abreast of emerging and still nascent

skills that have the potential for broad adoption in the future, such as social media marketing, human-centered design, workflow automation and front-end web development. These emerging skills can be viewed as a signpost for how industries are transforming, and vocational education needs to be sensitive to such changes to anticipate and-adjust quickly to industry developments so they can produce competent and highly skilled graduates. •

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Investing in People Needs Fresh Collaboration

orld Bank vice president for East Asia and Pacific Victoria Kwakwa was more than correct when underlining the importance of ASEAN in investing in people as key to better development (*The Jakarta Post*, Sept. 10).

She wrote that while ASEAN "as a whole has been a standout success story", "[y]et on average, education, skill development and health indicators are below what is expected given ASEAN's in-come levels. There are also wide disparities in life expectancy, job productivity and education quality across the region".

This high enthusiasm in investing in people was also palpable among members countries of the Southeast Asian Minister of Education Organizations (SEAMEO), which recently gathered in Kuala Lumpur to discuss strategic plans for years ahead. The conference saw a handover of the SEAMEO presidency from Indonesian education minister Muhadjir Effendy to Malaysian education minister Maszlee Malik, who will lead the organization from this year to 2021.

The festive handover was filled with the spirit of siblinghood, but the consciousness of hard-hitting reality ahead soon tainted the jovial mood.

Maszlee has a staggering task ahead as the competitiveness of the region is still low and the disparities and inequalities of education in the region are troublesome.

The IMD World Digital Competitiveness Ranking 2018 study shows the disconsolate picture that most countries in Southeast Asia have witnessed a relative drop in the ranking of overall and digital competitiveness.

Worse, dropping three ranks to 62nd in the overall digital ranking, Indonesia is the lowest ranking country in the region.

With a total population of 641.77 million and a growing middle class, the region is a money spinning market to tap for big educational digital industries such as those from United States and China. Nevertheless, being digitally uncompetitive will only make the population of Southeast Asia a mere captive market.

And the disparity and inequalities exist not only between less developing and more developing countries but also within the countries in a form of rural-urban areas and public-private education institutions or among provinces of the countries.

There are also gender and socioeconomic conditions that result in disparities in the delivery of quality learning opportunities.

For example, the rate of female enrollment in upper secondary education is relatively lower than that of male enrollment in Vietnam. Ethnic minority 'school girls are considered the most disadvantaged in upper secondary education.

In Indonesia, educational disparities are obvious across geographical areas, urban and rural, between the western and eastern part of Indonesia and among groups of people with varying in comes and gender.

President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's determination to focus on the development of human resources in his second term is promising, though concrete steps need a reality check.

In Malaysia, a main focus is already in achievement gaps, since subject matters like English, science and mathematics all emphasize the need to narrow the gaps between urban and rural students.

"We should embrace the spirit of regionalism and the spirit of one big Asian family [...] we should work together based on our strengths [...], "Maszlee said in his speech.

SEAMEO, established in 1965, two years before ASEAN, can be effectively treated as a focus entry of education, as it supervises 26 educational centers with certain expertise across Southeast Asian countries.

However, the collaboration should depart from a typical "Asian" way, where polite words are more palpable than concrete work.

First, the leadership of every party in the collaboration needs to be deeply involved and continually supportive of successful results. Every education minister should be committed to translating decisions into policy.

Second, for effective decision-making, regional cooperation needs to carefully balance the needs of the multiple units of the involved parties through wide consultancy with the relevant units of respective education ministries. And third, both SEAMEO and ASEAN should focus on common interests.

The seven priorities of SEAMEO areas are achieving universal early childhood care and education, addressing barriers to inclusion, resiliency in the face of emergencies, promoting technical and vocational education and training, revitalizing teacher education, harmonizing higher education and research and adopting a 21st century curriculum.

The eight subgoals of ASEAN's work plan include ASEAN awareness, quality and access to basic education, information and communication technology CCT) in education, technical and vocational education and training; and lifelong learning, education for sustainable development, higher education quality assurance, university-industry partnership and capacity building for teachers and community.

Certainly, there are interspersed points that can be worked out. For example, addressing barriers to inclusion can be addressed with the use of ICT in education.

Last, aside from public funding that the organizations receive from respective governments, the collaborative efforts should also devise an "entrepreneurial mechanism" by involving private sectors to generate more support for their agreed agenda, thus delivering more to the people of the region.

The involved parties should be able to anticipate and act

swiftly upon any emerging development bypassing the sometimes. sluggish. government bureaucracy if necessary, and collaborate more prolifically with more partners to unleash the very potential of this rich but still sleepy region. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, October 12, 2019

Can Technology Shape Character?

■ he new education and culture minister, Nadiem Makarim, said that competency and character were two of the most important aspects of education. The Cabinet's youngest minister, who led Gojek from a delivery call center consisting of 20 ojek (motorcycle taxi) drivers to a US\$10 billion company with 2 million partners across Southeast Asia, said the education system should be significantly enhanced with the use of technology, which is indeed indispensable in this 4.0 era.

President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo trusted Nadiem to lead this giant leap in Indonesia's education, which is unfortunately still mired in convoluted problems such as a shortage of teachers, irrelevant vocational education, burden some curricula and uncompetitive university graduates.

With the reintegration of the Research, Technology and Higher Education Ministry into the current Education and Culture Ministry, which previously supervised only primary and secondary education, the scope of the endeavor has now widened.

There is no question that technology shapes students' competency - computer-assisted coding to teach basic to advanced logic, for example. But the pressing question is: can technology help shape students' character? Can teaching virtues such as selfcontrol, honesty, respect and fairness—which contribute to good character—be technically and effectively delivered via technology?

Nadiem's awareness about the issue of character building, which is the very heart of education, is a good sign that he is at the correct starting point in his ministership.

Adults used to be the filters through which children were exposed to proper values. But now, with mobile gadgets in most children's hands, that role is largely absent. Children are increasingly outside the reach of adult influence.

For example, open and distance learning, which are now mostly assisted by technology; such as the digital learning management system and massive open online courses, enable students to learn anytime, anywhere—almost without the physical presence of instructors or teachers.

Besides Universitas Terbuka, a university that has provided full open and distance education since its establishment in 1984, other regular higher education institutions have been pushed by the government to introduce open and distance environments in the form of blended learning, which combines offline and online courses.

Basic and secondary education institutions have also been encouraged to apply this system to widen access to education and reach the previously unreachable. In every province there is at least one "hub" school, which acts as a provider of open and distance education for children who have difficulty attending school.

However, unlike other countries such as the United States, China and India, where technology-based open and distance education has earned trust both in the public and private sectors, with students scattered all over the world, making them citizens of an almost unlimited global digital village, Indonesia still has a long way to go.

Despite the push for the use of technology, monotonous teaching is still business as usual. And for most, technology-based education has still not been fully developed, not only due to the lack of infrastructure but also because of unwillingness to depart from the current comfort zone and skepticism about the effectiveness of the pedagogical use of technology.

For example, one educator cast doubt on the ability of technology-based distance education to really help shape students' characters. The practical – absence of adults and the limited physical space for students to interact with each other have raised

doubts about whether proper character education is really possible through technology.

Therefore, the current virtual coordination training program, which trains teachers in digital literacy awareness, is instrumental to opening up teachers' perspectives and should be continued with the ministry's full support and more extensive teacher involvement.

How about necessary skills for students?

US-based Center for Media Literacy chief executive officer Tessa Jools has proposed what she called "process skills" of knowledge acquisition, problem solving and citizenship for students to be able to "benefit from technology, to manage the risks they encounter, and to make responsible choices on lifelong basis".

Hence, the 21st century skills of 4C-communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity - should also consist of citizenship and self-direction skills since students are part of a global village with certain norms and regulations and will interact and collaborate with their peers in other parts of the world.

These process skills, which are deeply grounded in values and character, should be designed in a way that allows students to acquire them through blended or even full online learning.

For example, certain community projects, which promote the values of diversity, can be conducted with the use of empowermentoriented online platforms.

The use of communication technologies can also help marginalized and disadvantaged young people to develop their identities and learn life skills.

The challenge is to gather the very best of our digital talent education experts, practitioners and policymakers—to sit together and design a practical and steadfast technology-based education system in which character education is profoundly enshrined.

In other words, innovation with the use of technology and its continuous creative integration into pedagogy, including character

development, is a prerequisite for the Education and Culture Ministry to take the giant leap of embracing an entirely fresh look at Indonesia's education ecosystem.

Another challenge for Nadiem will be confronting the fact that customized and quickly adjustable innovation is almost unworkable within the current rigid government budget regime, where too-strict financial allocation mechanisms, mean lawmakers have to constantly navigate a labyrinth of potential legal consequences.

The Finance Ministry needs to ease its financial regulation to give more space and flexibility to other ministries, particularly the Education and Culture Ministry, to use their budget allocation in a way that adapts to emerging change and new innovations and adjusts policy accordingly while adhering to principles of accountability. •

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Muhammadiyah at 107- New Challenges, Roles In Education

uring the celebration of the 107th anniversary of the Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's first Muslim organization which merged traditional Islamic and Western style of education, chairman Haedar Nashir reiterated the organization's mission to spur on a renaissance in the nation. The celebration took place in the organization's hometown at Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta (UMY).

At the celebration Education and Culture Minister Nadiem Makarim praised Muhammadiyah for its efforts to realize education for all way before the proclamation of the republic in 1945.

Since its establishment on Nov. 18, 1912, in Yogyakarta by its founder Ahmad Dahlan as a reformist socioreligious movement, advocating ijtihad or individual interpretation of Quran and sunnah (Prophet's sayings), Muhammadiyah has established thousands of schools and hundreds of universities, hospitals, and orphanages across the archipelago.

Nevertheless, it was not the headquarters of Muhammadiyah that directed the massive development of these nonprofit endeavors. It was the voluntary work of millions of members who shared the goal of spreading the Islamic teaching of rahmatan lil 'alamin (blessing for the whole world) through non-profit activities.

The efforts combine refinement of Islamic teaching and modernization, particularly through education. But everyone is welcome to join the endeavor. In eastern Indonesia, for example, most students of Muhammadiyah universities and schools are nonMuslims, and some of the graduates have become local leaders in both government and non-government sectors, contributing to the progress of their respective communities.

The universities and schools teach Islam and kemuhammadiyahan (Muhammadiyahness) to non-Muslim students, and never force them to change their faith. At the same time, non-Muslim students also receive religious lessons from religion teachers according to their belief.

Muhammadiyah, one of the nation's largest organizations with approximately 70 million members, has also given birth no national heroes, such as the nation's first president, Sukarno, who was involved in its education council during his stay in Bengkulu; legal expert Djuanda Kartawidjaja, who helped global recognition for Indonesia as an archipelagic state, military general Sudirman who developed Muhammadiyah's scout Hizbul Wathon and many others including its founder Ahmad Dahlan.

But Muhammadiyah should not be too proud of its achievement. The challenges have become even more unpredictable. Among other things, competition between public and private education and even among private schools themselves is getting tighter.

First, regarding the disparity of quality among Muhammadiyah universities and schools, as the establishment of universities and schools is largely the work of members scattered across the archipelago, national-level planning for the institutions is obviously absent and national quality control is certainly a giant effort.

Therefore, the Muhammadiyah education council at the every level needs to actively galvanize support from members and sympathizers to maintain and improve education quality. This can be done not only by donations but also through creatively established entrepreneurial activities, as exemplified by several Muhammadiyah universities and schools in Malang, East Java, Lampung and many others such as by establishing hotels, gas

stations, and others so they can have more financial freedom.

Second, Muhammadiyah universities and schools need to always sharpen their added value through character education, the teaching of Islam and kemuhammadiyahan.

Beyond the classroom, such education is carried out through affective and psycho-motoric activities in extracurricular programs such as scouts, Tapak Suci martial arts and student organizations such as Ikatan Pelajar Muhammadiyah (Muhammadiyah Students' Association) for secondary education and Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (Muhammadiyah Higher Education Students' Association) for higher education.

Hence, those who graduate from Muhammadiyah education institutions are expected not only to develop thinking capacity but also social and leadership skills, so that they can exploit their talent and potential to the fullest for their communities.

This gives them comparative advantages against other educational institutions

Third, Muhammadiyah should take full advantage of the 4.0 era to ensure continuous teacher professional development particularly for their struggling education institutions in remote and difficult areas.

The education councils need to replicate efforts by the Muhammadiyah education councils of East and West Java in implementing digital awareness programs among Muhammadiyah teachers. The programs particularly target teachers who have never obtained additional training.

Muhammadiyah's national higher education council has also been pioneering information and communication technologybased open and distance learning among well-established universities.

These attempts should improve the quality of less-developed Muhammadiyah universities, as the program is not only aimed at students but also at lecturers.

This program, called Muhammadiyah Online University,

was launched during the recent celebration, as a clear signal that Muhammadiyah is ready to embrace the 4.0 era. Similar attempts should follow in primary and secondary education, where the more established schools should help to improve the quality of less advanced ones.

Fourth, Muhammadiyah should not rely on mere government support. For over a century its core strength has been its self-reliant volunteers. Moreover, nongovernment entities naturally have more room to maneuver and innovate to progress, compared to the highly-regulated, too bureaucratic public education sector. Fifth, Muhammadiyah should continue to strengthen its cooperation with partners from all over the world to spread the message of peaceful and progressive Islam. Among others we have cooperated with the Rome-based, Catholic-oriented Community of Sant'Egidio through exchange of activist with Thailand's government through the provision of scholarship of students of its Muslim-dominated southern part to study in Muhammadiyah universities; with Myanmar's government to develop education institutions for the Rohingya Muslim internally displace people and many others.

Lastly, Muhammadiyah needs to break the current taboo of pracital politics without violating the core of the organization as a nonprofit and nonpolitical organization.

Muhammadiyah will never become a political party, but the Muhammadiyah board in every level of the country needs to extend full support to Muhammadiyah members who aspire to pursue political careers.

By having good members and alumni in the executive and legislative branches, Muhammadiyah will be able to increase its ability to carry out its noble mission to bring a renaissance to the life of the nation. •

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Indonesia Sales Competition (ISAC): A First Step to Prepare Sales Professionals

Business to Business (B2B) marketing is believed to be very crucial in today's business and online world. There has been a paradigm shift in the way we sell and market today. Obviously, selling products and services is the ultimate goal of every business/company. However, if the company does not own qualified sales professionals, it is most likely that the success will be far to reach. Therefore, businesses nowadays will look for graduates from any field who possess the future professional sales skills.

SEAMEO Regional Open Learning Centre (SEAMOLEC) together with Southeast Asia Sales Competition (SEASAC) Project partners have been collaborating on various programs for the last two years to strengthen Southeast Asian universities' capability to provide highly skilled B2B sales professionals for the emerging international markets. This project utilizes existing European knowledge and experiences in developing a pedagogically rich concept for the cooperation of universities and companies in sales education. Best practices from Europe are matched with Asian sales cultures.

One way that students' sales skills can be improved is through a well-designed sales competition. In early 2020, the Indonesian partners of the SEASAC Project agreed to hold a competition for national scale business called Indonesia Sales Competition (ISAC). ISAC is a special competition arranged for Indonesian students conducted virtually using Zoom and YouTube live as platforms from Nov. 24 to 25, 2020. At least 20 students from

five university members of the SEASAC Project Consortium participated, they were from Universitas Putra Indonesia "YPTK" Padang, Universitas Negeri Sebelas Maret (UNS), Universitas Bina Nusantara (Binus), Politeknik Negeri Batam (Polibatam) and Universitas Katolik Parahyangan (Unpar). The ISAC committee also on a limited basis invited several lecturers from universities outside the consortium and representatives from the Ministry of Education and Culture to participate as judges or observers in this competition. It aimed to prepare students to be highly skilled B2B sales professionals in Indonesia who understand the process and ethics in sales. Moreover, it will also be beneficial for industries and companies in Indonesia to obtain university graduates who are able to do sales, especially B2B sales. In the series of ISAC activities, an international webinar was also held with the theme "Preparing Students Towards New Era of B2B Sales", which aimed to introduce various strategies to prepare future sales professionals in a new era of B2B sales. It was open for public participation, especially lecturers, students, sales practitioners and business stakeholders in Southeast Asia.

The international webinar started with a report from Dr. Muhammad Ridwan, SE, MM, head of the ISAC Committee, University of Putra Indonesia "YPTK" Padang, followed by welcoming remarks by R. Alpha Amirrachman, Ph.D, SEAMOLEC director. It was officially opened by Finnan Hidayat, the subcoordinator for partnership, Secretariat of Higher Education Directorate General, the Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Indonesia. It featured three speakers: Benny Kusuma from Microsoft Indonesia, Harri Lappalainen from Turku University of Applied Sciences, Finland, and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Pomlapas Suwannarat from Mahasarakham University, Thailand. These events were prepared by UPI YPTK Padang and SEAMOLEC, and were also supported by the the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, UNS, Binus, Polibatam, Unpar, Mahasarakham University, Thailand and Turku University

of Applied Sciences, Finland. The competition prizes were provided by the supporting sponsors: Gistrav Group, Bank Mandiri Syariah, Gojek and Silungkang Art Center. ISAC was held in three rounds: qualification, seminal, and final round using Bahasa Indonesia as the main language. The winners of the lg ISAC 2020 were:

1st winner: Gabriella Stephanie Siregar from Polibatam
2 nd winner: Aditya Putra from Unpar
3 rd winner: Rajendra Khalil Afif from Binus University
4th winner: Noel Steven Limbong from Polibatam

The international webinar was closed by Beny Bandanadjaja, director of vocational higher education and profession, Vocational Education Directorate General, the Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Indonesia.

For more information on SEASAC project and ISAC please visit https://seasalescompetition.com/.

CKR/AA. •

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Fostering Global Citizenship Through Sales Competition

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Abstract

lobal Citizenship is a broad concept and has different layer of perspectives depending on who uses the term. One of the perspectives is to see it as practice of cultural empathy or intercultural competence, which are commonly articulated as a goal of global education. For students, becoming global citizens can benefit them in other ways—skills such as problem-solving, communication, collaboration, and cross-cultural awareness will benefit them immeasurably. SEAMEO Regional Open Learning Centre (SEAMOLEC) realizes that a competition programme joined by students from different nations could work best to foster the relevant skills of being the global citizens. Another crucial field of globalization is sales and business that will grow global and demand high-skilled sales professional across the globe. Business to Business (B2B) marketing is believed to be very important in today's business and online world. A company depends on its sales, it is a fundamental need if a business is to survive and grow. Meanwhile, there is a shortage of sales graduates, those with critical thinking combined with the relevant skillset. However, in Southeast Asia, very few universities actually teach sales. Sales competitions address this need. They introduce the sales processes and ethical nature of professional selling skills to universities. Competitions allow individuals to learn valuable life-long skills,

such as ethics, listening, building trust, and fulfilling client needs. It is a win-win for students as it raises their professional practices, and for the businesses as it creates a win for the client or customer.

SEAMOLEC has been involved in a cross-country project called the Southeast Asia Sales Competition (SEASAC). It is a three-year project (2019-2021) funded by Erasmus+ Capacity Building in the field of higher education. This project aims to strengthen Southeast Asian Universities' capability to provide highly skilled B2B sales professionals for the emerging international markets. Existing European knowledge and experiences in development of pedagogy sales education will be utilized and being adapted into rich Southeast Asian cultures. The SEASAC consortium consists of 4 European universities (Finland, Austria, Scotland), 2 Thailand universities, 5 Indonesian universities, and SEAMOLEC. Starting November 2018 until March 2020, several activities have been conducted by all consortium members, such as developing website and social media for project branding, managing mentor meeting for university partners, conducting universities' sales courses and competition, as well as organizing the 1st SEASAC Event in Mahasarakham, Thailand, in February 2020.

Right after the event, Indonesia and Thailand government started the emergency status protocol due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, all planned activities related to the project were forced to be changed into online mode. Several meetings were held involving all consortium members through video conference platform discussing alternate scenarios.

This paper will explain about the sales competition held for students across the nation with regards to sales skills improvement for the students as well as promoting global citizenship. It will also shed some light on the changing scenarios from the regular meetings and events to the online mode. It applies to all local, regional, and international activities within the project.

Keywords: Global citizenship, sales competition, students' competition, Southeast Asia, higher education

Introduction

The world is becoming more globalized, there is no doubt about that. It is true that people say the world is becoming smaller due to the existence of technology and its impacts. A student from Indonesia could easily interact and share interests with another student in Middle East, a single housewife from Vietnam could search for Mexican recipe in some blogs and try cooking, or a Burmese artist can now sell his or her art products in European market.

Around the globe all kind of individuals and groups are connected easily, and no single crisis could slow down their activities, not even an economic crisis. As quoted from Nairn (2009) in one of his articles entitled 'Globalization', Globalization is such a diverse, broad-based, and potent force that not even today's massive economic crash will dramatically slow it down or permanently reverse it.

When we are getting ready and preparing ourselves to face the advancement of globalization, we were hit by a global pandemic of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) with complexity that was never expected before. Mitigation of the crisis has significant difficulties, and as the consequences, the new normal in all social and economic aspects must be accepted. New normal will be a new trajectory transformation towards digital society or less physical contact society.

In the new normal era, our way of living is different as well as our way of doing business than before. In a shared digital economy, the services are getting more affordable, faster and cheaper as an impact of the efficiency in the utilization of resources. Innovation is also mandatory in order to increase the productivity, efficiency, contribution to added value, as well as sustainability of national industries. However, success in sales is a must for business growth and sustainability. No business can live without sales.

Southeast Asia as a very potential region in the world needs highly qualified human resources who are able to adapt to changes

and has great sense to act as active global citizens. SEAMEO Regional Open Learning Centre (SEAMOLEC) realizes that a competition programme joined by students from different nations could work best to foster the relevant skills of being the global citizens.

Global Citizenship for Students

Global Citizenship is a broad concept and has different layer of perspectives depending on who uses the term. One of the perspectives is to see it as practice of cultural empathy or intercultural competence, which are commonly articulated as a goal of global education. For students, becoming global citizens can benefit them in other ways—skills such as problem-solving, communication, collaboration, and cross-cultural awareness will benefit them immeasurably.

According to the United Nations (UN), global citizenship education provides the understanding, skills and values students need to cooperate in resolving the interconnected challenges of the 21st century, including climate change, conflict, poverty, hunger, and issues of equity and sustainability. These same educational outcomes prepare students to be successful in the workplace of the 21st century as well.

Globalization in Sales Field

Another crucial field of globalization is sales and business that will grow global and demand high-skilled sales professional across the globe. Business to Business (B2B) marketing is believed to be very important in today's business and online world. A company depends on its sales, it is a fundamental need if a business is to survive and grow. Meanwhile, there is a shortage of sales graduates, those with critical thinking combined with the relevant skillset.

Based on the 2019 Global Competitiveness Index which measures national productivity levels, Indonesia is in number 50 out of 141 countries in the world or number 4 in Southeast Asia region, behind Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. To improve the competitiveness

of human resources in Indonesia, one effort that can be implemented is to improve the quality of higher education (university/polytechnic) graduates with the mindset and competence needed in the modern era of international business. Success in sales is mandatory for business growth and sustainability.

However, in Southeast Asia, very few universities actually teach sales, and it is still challenging for companies in the region to get higher education graduates who are able to do sales, especially in B2B sales. Sales competitions is one way of addressing this need. They introduce the sales processes and ethical nature of professional selling skills to universities. Competitions allow individuals to learn valuable life-long skills, such as ethics, listening, building trust, and fulfilling client needs. It is a win-win for students as it raises their professional practices, equipped them as graduates with critical thinking combined with the relevant skillset. Apart from students, industry/business will also benefit from a 'sales' competition. Business managers/ sales professionals can participate in competitions as buyers so they can see firsthand the student's competence in order to convince clients to buy their products/services.

University-level sales competitions have been held in the United States for more than a decade and have succeeded in the international outlook increment for the country. In Turku, Finland, The Turku Sales Competition was held by Turku University of Applied Sciences for 10 years. Meanwhile, in Europe, The European Sales Competition was held for the first time in 2014. In Southeast Asia, by the support of the Erasmus + Capacity Building program, the 1st Southeast Asia Sales Competition was successfully conducted in 2020 in Mahasarakham, Thailand.

South-East Asian Sales Competition (SEASAC)

SEAMOLEC considers that it is indeed a great idea to foster global citizenship concept to Southeast Asian youngsters through a project called the South-East Asian Sales Competition (SEASAC).

SEASAC is a 3-year Project (2019-2021), first launched on Thursday, March 21, 2019 in Jakarta, Indonesia. It is a cooperation between universities and government agencies in Southeast Asia and European universities in form of consortium. Founded by a European Community Erasmus+ project, the project designed to adapt competitions in Europe and build capacity in higher education. It utilises existing European knowledge and experiences in developing a pedagogically rich concept for the cooperation of universities and companies in sales education. The best practices from Europe being matched with Asian sales cultures.

The project works under the coordination of the consortium partners, they are:

- Turku University of Applied Sciences, Finland
- University of Applied Sciences Wiener Neustadt, Austria 2.
- 3. Edinburh Napier University, Scotland
- Haaga Helia University of Applied Sciences, Finland 4.
- 5. Mahasarakham University, Thailand
- 6. Rangsit University, Thailand
- 7. Binus University, Indonesia
- Universitas Putra Indonesia "YPTK" Padang, Indonesia 8.
- 9. Sebelas Maret University, Indonesia
- 10. Parhayangan Catholic University, Indonesia
- 11. State Polytechnic Batam,
- 12. SEAMEO Regional Open Learning Centre (SEAMOLEC)

And with supports from its associate partners, namely, European Sales Competition Association and Ministry of Education, Republic of Indonesia.

What is A Sales Competition Looks Like?

Sales competition applied in SEASAC Project is An exciting interactive method of learning, which gives students opportunities to learn from businesses, and at the same time introducing both sides to potential recruitment opportunities. It involves a simulated buyer/seller role-play. Offer an exciting way for students to learn practical skills derived from research that will have an impact on businesses and employability.

Students will be expected to role-play with the buyer in a fifteenminute 'sales discussion'. Often these are based on cases (simulated sales scenarios) submitted, or originated, in conjunction between the organizers and a sponsor. Sponsors and students will meet and practice in scenarios that simulate 'real-life'. Judges may come from the sponsoring company, academics or other businesspeople.





Figure 1. The role play between competitor as a sales person, observed by judges

There are normally two rounds. Depending on the number of entrants and time available. Students who succeed in the first round are normally given a short time to prepare for a more indepth interview in the final round.

This method of learning through competition is very beneficial and powerful, especially to the students as competitors to promote their confidence and learning. Students are well prepared, as they have been given case studies, detail and practice well in advance. Opportunities for employers, students, and leaders in sales coaching and education to mix. In sum, sales competitions are an exceptional learning opportunity as well as great fun!

SEASAC is for university students, initially, the competition will be open only to students from our partners. However, in future the opportunity for competition is expected to be open to all universities and students within the South-East Asia region.

After Covid-19: Changes of Scenario

Due to COVID-19 Pandemic, some of the activities planned need to be conducted virtually. The last event conducted face to face was the 1st SEASAC held in Mahasarakham, Thailand in February 2020. After that, all countries restricted travelling abroad for their citizens. SEASAC partners then agreed to meet virtually to find alternative ways to undergo the rest of the events, such as; coordination meetings, tryouts, promotional activities, local and international sales competition, international webinar, report meetings, etc.





Figure 2. The official launching and press conference events in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 2019

Here is the highlight of activities of SEASAC Project since its first launched in 2019, the changes of scenario to conduct the activities can be viewed in the note column.

Table 1. Highlights of activities of SEASAC Project before and after COVID-19

Events	Timeline	Note		
Before COVID-19				
Opening Ceremony	March 2019	Held in face to face. With support of Directorate General of Learning and Students Affairs. Ministry of Research Technology and Higher Education (MoRTHE), Indonesia		
Training of Trainers	March 2019	Held in face to face. Held back-to-back with the Opening Ceremony, hosted by BINUS university.		
1st Pilot and Mentoring	April 2019 – January 2020	Held in face to face. After participation at TOT, all lecturers set up their own B2B sales courses and tried to run their own sales competition.		
Turku UAS Grand Study Tour	November 2019	Held in face to face. Lecturers of SEASAC partners were invited to Turku University of Applied Sciences (Turku UAS) and experienced as Turku Sales Competition (TSC) judges.		
The 1st South- East Asian Sales Competition – SEASAC	February 2020	Held in face to face. Held in Mahasarakham, Thailand at the end of February 2020 hosted by Mahasarakham University		
After COVID-19				
2 nd Pilot and Mentoring	March 2020- February 2021	The 2nd run of the B2B sales courses as well as its competition were conducted virtually during the pandemic		

The 15th Turku Sales Competition – TSC	November 2020	Students from SEASAC partners participated virtually in the 15th Turku Sales Competition and competed against Turku UAS students from Finland as well as its exchange students from other 6 countries in Europe as well as the United States
The 1st Indonesia Sales Competition – ISAC	November 2020	Conducted virtually hosted by UPI "YPTK" Padang
International Webinar on Preparing Students towards New Era of B2B Sales	November 2020	Hosted virtually by SEAMOLEC
The 6th European Sales Competition – ESC	December 2020	SEASAC partners were honored to be invited virtually as competitors as well as judges.
The 2nd South-East Asian Sales Competition – SEASAC 2021	3-5 March 2021	Hosted virtually by Parahiyangan Catholic University (UNPAR)



Picture 3. Training of Trainers held in Jakarta, March 2021



Figure 4 Turku University of Applied Sciences Grand Study Tour in Finland, November 2019



Figure 5. The 1st SEASAC, held in Mahasarakham, Thailand in February 2020



Figure 6. Virtual activities after COVID-19: coordination meetings between Southeast Asia and European partner



Figure 7. International Webinar: Preparing Students towards New Era of B2B Sales in November 2020

The project also applies a more active usage of website and social media channels to promote and publish all activities. The social media accounts are:

- YouTube: SEASAC Project South-East Asian Sales Competition Facebook: Seasac Project
- Instagram: @seasac_project Twitter: @SeasacP
- All information related to SEASAC can be accessed at: our official website: https://seasalescompetition.com/.

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Moderate Religious Education Matters to Youths

akiah Aini's lone wolf attack on the National Police headquarters in South Jakarta last week highlights the growing role of youth in terrorism. Police shot dead the 25-year-old, who family and acquaintances said was "shy", and who carried out the attack with an airsoft gun.

This is the latest in the police's crackdown on suspected terrorists and terrorist activities, which has resulted in 1773 arrests nationwide since 2018.

The involvement of youth in terror attacks around the world is not new. Young women in particular are often used to deliver secret messages and carry out violent attacks, including suicide bombings. It is believed they arouse less suspicion and so can get closer to their targets.

But any violence that involves youth rattles our conscience as to how youthful vibrancy and idealism could transform into unimaginable murderous acts, which could potentially shake up the establishment and threaten the public.

Youth groups often play important roles in turbulent times, as we can see from our own history: It was our youths who bravely changed the course of the archipelago toward Indonesian independence in 1945, and toward democracy in 1998. When they are part of a broader social movement, they can be very militant and strongly influence their age cohorts in the movement's development.

Depending on the perspective, their actions can be deemed as either heroic or its opposite. But what Aini did was very far from a heroic act; it was gravely unacceptable from the perspective of basic humanity. She also destroyed her future and her family's hopes.

Youths usually have a need to define themselves and their identities: some seek recognition and status, others seek adventure, and still others seek a group to join.

In the case of Aini, she found Islamic State (IS) as an organization that could help define herself. But IS is not just an organization; it is an ideology and a global brand that spins a "heroic narrative" in what followers perceive to be an idealized version of Islamic world order. Not surprisingly, Aini posted a picture of an IS flag on her Instagram account just a couple of hours before she attacked the police headquarters.

It is believed she had been radicalized some time before her death through meetings with IS supporters and would-be jihadists both in person and online.

These methods can intertwine in practice, and recruiters also use all other possible means to do their job.

Hence, the danger is real and tangible. What can we do?

The efforts must focus on earthly intervention rather than responding after the fact, and this requires all stakeholders to work hand in hand. We cannot rely solely on the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPY), which focuses more on deradicalization.

But the deradicalization program has received much criticism, as it seemed to strongly portray certain segments of society, particularly Muslims, as already radicalized and therefore they needed to be "fixed" by deradicalizing them.

Moderate Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama have proposed that what they call "religious moderation" should be instilled in environments and the education ecosystem where youths undergo cognitive, affective and psychomotor development, such as Islamic boarding schools, regular schools, their communities and at home.

The Religious Affairs Ministry has formally adopted this stance

and defines religious moderation as "religious views, behavior and practices in living together by embodying the essence of religious teachings that protect human dignity and develop the common good based on the principles of fairness, balance and obeying the Constitution as a national agreement".

The Education and Culture Ministry has chosen the term Pelajar Pancasila (student of Pancasila) in reference to the state ideology, in the hope that students will internalize and implement Pancasila values, which promote tolerance and inclusiveness, in their day-to-day lives.

But much needs to be done to create and educational ecosystem that is conducive to building a truly tolerant society and prevent youths from becoming radicalized by extremist ideas and ideologies.

Since religion is strongly and historically embedded in Indonesian society, it is imperative that moderate religious life is an inherent part of the education system as a whole, not only in religious schools, but also in regular schools.

Extracurricular programs can involve broad-minded local religious figures and carefully designed with moderate religious activities that promote pluralism, tolerance and respect for humanity. These activities can be blended with projects that are creative, enjoyable, challenging and enriching, and which also fulfill the psychological and pedagogical needs of youths to help them define themselves. •

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ICT Habituation: The Silver Lining of The Pandemic

R Alpha Amirrachman, Ph.D Aline Almandha, M.Ikom

The Changes in Education Caused by Covid-19 Pandemic

he year 2020 has been a hard time for everyone. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought life around the world to a standstill. Millions of people in the whole world are still lockdown after the virus outbreak. This condition is expected to have enormous consequences to many life sectors. For sure it is having a devastating impact on global education as well. Large-scale of national efforts in utilizing technology to support remote learning, distance education and online learning are emerging and evolving quickly.

According to the latest figures released by UNESCO, some 1.3 billion learners around the world were not able to attend school or university as of March 23, 2020 (McCarthy, 2020). The closure of schools deprives students of opportunities for development and improvement. It also forces teachers to deliver their normal classroom teaching practice into an online environment.

During the social distancing period of Covid-19, Indonesia Government applied an emergency policy for its citizens to stay at home starting early 2020. The schools and universities are closed, and students are being sent home during the period for their own health and safety. This condition forced teachers and lecturers to design alternative learning methods to make sure students can continue their learning at home.

In the schooling level in Indonesia, the national exam was

cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic, final exams for junior classes were replaced by online tests, home assignments and/ or decided based on the student's portfolio and previous school performance. The use of TV Edukasi, or Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia (Education TV, formerly TVE), National Television, and Rumah Belajar, (Learning House) a learning management system as well as digital lessons, electronic textbooks and practice assessment tools were applied and aligned to the curriculum (Worldbank, 2020).

Meanwhile, in the higher education level, Online Learning System Program (SPADA) is used. The learning activities were 70% conducted remotely through online courses, and 30% face to face meeting for practices and practicum. Of course, by applying strict health protocol, less density, less contact, no crowd. Students will have 3 semesters off campus learning.

It is agreed that the year 2020 is among the hardest years of the century. It seems as if there is nothing but bad news we see and hear every day, more cases, more losses, and more restrictions. Meanwhile, there is a saying "Every dark cloud has a silver lining", which means that difficult times always lead to better days. In this case, it is the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skill improvement of all stakeholders of education.

Nowadays, education personnel have moved large-scale immersive learning experiences to a virtual platform, needing to conceptualize and implement new approaches to collaborative teaching and learning. Students have developed their digital competencies with the support of their parents to engage with their learning and reduce anxiety in the stressful times. Parents adapting themselves to use technology more effectively and become a key resource for education provision as both motivators of student engagement and facilitators of student learning.

SEAMOLEC Roles

SEAMEO Regional Open Learning Centre (SEAMOLEC) is one of the 26 Centres under the auspices of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) focusing on the field of Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Owing to various programs that become its core tasks, like; trainings, consultancies, research and development, and information dissemination, SEAMOLEC is assisting the SEAMEO Member Countries to find alternative solution to enhance the quality of its people through Open and Distance Learning (ODL). The goal of SEAMOLEC is to undertake relevant programs that are responsive to current national and regional needs through the utilization of ODL system.

SEAMOLEC has taken its efforts through national and regional programmes to support teachers and educators to overcome challenges during the pandemic responding to its mission of utilizing distance learning and educational technology. During the pandemic, not all teachers are ready to organize online learning. Therefore, SEAMOLEC responsively arranged various programmes to help and facilitate teachers in managing their online classes effectively.

Though the pandemic virus has caused immense suffering and challenges, there have been some surprising and unanticipated silver linings. Proving that nothing is absolute, and that positive things can come out of even the worst tragedies. Among others is the acceleration of ICT habituation in the society. It is marked by the increasing numbers of free and meaningful webinars, online courses, online training programmes, and many more.

The world has certainly woken up to the need to be online and to have digital/ICT literacy. Since the beginning of the 21st century, researchers have been emphasising the fact that the students who lack of ICT literacy skills will be ineffective and inefficient to work in the future. The situation that forced everyone to change their mindset and to use technology as main tool of communication, trading, and learning, has brought everyone to the higher level

of technological capabilities. To response to this situation, SEAMOLEC prepares various programmes to serve education stakeholders, this includes teachers, students, and wider public.

Programmes for Teachers

With all the limitation we are facing during this pandemic, SEAMOLEC has been able to carry out several programmes based on its vision, mission, and core tasks. The Centre realizes some teachers may be familiar with technology utilization to support their teaching activities, but some are clueless. Teachers are continuously looking for the easiest and best way to adapt to this new reality and finding educational resources to help them deliver their classes online. SEAMOLEC sees this as an opportunity to put its innovations to real practices.

One of the core tasks of SEAMOLEC is conducting various training programmes. About 90% of the participants are teachers. Aside than the regular face-to-face training, starting in 2016 SEAMOLEC also conducts online training programmes. Those 2 methods of training are aimed to assist educators for improving their skills in applying ICT into their teaching and learning. By having these skills, educators will be able to conduct the e-collaborative learning with other schools/universities in Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

SEAMOLEC arranged programmes to help and facilitate teachers in managing their online classes effectively. There were 2 main programmes being conducted during March to May 2020: SEAMOLEC Mini Lecture Series (SMILES) in 3 batches, and SEAMOLEC Ramadan Specials in 4 series.

SEAMOLEC Mini Lecture Series (SMILES)

SEAMOLEC provides a programme called SEAMOLEC Mini Lecture Series, or "SMILES". It is an online course specially designed for educators, provides simple and ready-to-use materials including strategies and tips in designing online learning. The

materials delivered within this programme include the concept of online learning, how to manage documents, how to host video conferences sessions, and also shared SEAMOLEC innovation platforms, such as e-learning platforms, learning management system, and open educational resources.







Pic 1. SMILES Posters for Promotional Media

SEAMOLEC uses its social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) for programme promotion. Detailed information was shared through postings, and public were directed to register to certain links. Participants were limited in each batch.

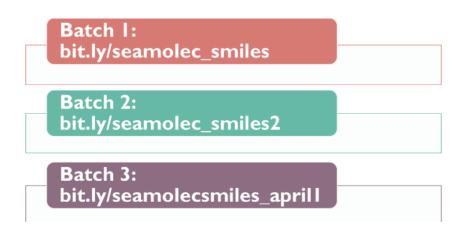
SMILES was held nationally in 3 batches with different topics of discussion. The first batch was a success, held on March 18-20, 2020 and participated by 200 participants. Due to a great number of requests by public for additional SMILES sessions, more batches were conducted. The second and third batch was held in cooperation with Directorate of Technical and Vocational Education (DTVE), MoEC of Indonesia reaching more participants to join. The second batch was held on March 25-27, 2020, participated by 800 participants, and the third one was held on April 2-3, 2020, participated by 951 participants. Total of 1.951 participants were teachers, lecturers, and educators participated in all 3 batches of SMILES.

Table 1. SMILES was conducted in 3 batches

Batch I	Batch 2	Batch 3
Held on March 18-20, 2020 200 participants	 Held on March 25-27, 2020 800 participants In cooperation with Directorate of Technical and Vocational Education (DTVE), MoEC of Indonesia 	 Held on April 2-3, 2020 951 participants In cooperation with Directorate of Technical and Vocational Education (DTVE), MoEC of Indonesia

Participants who successfully registered and attended 2 out of 3 sessions of each batch will receive e-certificate of completion from SEAMOLEC. And, to serve a wider public, SEAMOLEC provides resources link where all recorded web conference sessions and PowerPoint materials from all presenters of each batch are provided to be accessed by public through download links.

Table 2. Resources links





Pic 2. SMILES e-certificate

Regional SMILES

Following up the success of SMILES nationally, SEAMOLEC extended its expertise and service to regional and international participants. The Centre conducted The Regional SMILES held on June 10-11, 2020. It was a two-day online course with 2 hours duration in each session, discussing the topic of: Online Learning Made Simple: The Concept and Practice. Mr Dona Octanary (SEAMOLEC Research and Development Specialist) led the online sessions interactively with more than 3,000 participants who were teachers, lecturers, educators, and public with high interests to add their knowledge and skills through CISCO WebEx video conference platform, and YouTube live stream channel.





Pic 3. Poster of Regional SMILES

Pic 4. Interactive Participants at Regional SMILES

All materials are available to be downloaded through the link: bit.ly/SEA_smiles1. After the event, SEAMOLEC received various positive comments, feedbacks, and constructive inputs from all participants. Participants were granted with e-certificate of participation after completion of the programme.

Ramadan Specials

During Ramadan 2020, the holy month for Muslims, SEAMOLEC also hosted a special programme called SEAMOLEC Ramadan Specials. It was aimed to provide extra skills for educators to equip and support their online learning activities. Following the success of SMILES, this programme also applied a similar promotion and registration mechanism using SEAMOLEC's social media accounts.

This programme was held for 2-3 hours session for each topic, and with limitation of 200 participants in each session. There were 4 topics being delivered by SEAMOLEC instructors in 4 series, they were:

- 1. Practical Tips to Package E-modules, held on April 30, 2020 and participated by 211 participants.
- Quick and Easy Ways to Create Online Quizzes, held on May
 2020 and participated by 215 participants
- 3. Shooting Video Lecture for Online Class, held on May 15, 2020 and participated by 217 participants
- 4. Introduction to 3D Visualization for Learning, held on May 20, 2020 and participated by 165 participants

For the public who did not have time to join the series but interested in learning the topics, we provide links for material and recorded sessions to download.

Table 3. Link of recorded sessions and materials of Ramadan Specials

Link of recorded sessions and materials		
<u>bit.ly/seamolec_ramadan1</u>		
bit.ly/seamolec_ramadan2		
bit.ly/seamolec_ramadan3		
<u>bit.ly/seamolec_ramadan4</u>		

Programmes for Students

SEAMOLEC also pays attention to various activities to support students during the school from home period. The two major programmes provided for students are the South-East Asian Sales Competition (SEASAC) and Common ASEAN Tourism Curriculum (CATC) Webinar Series. These programmes are prepared to be participated by students from Southeast Asia Region.



Pic. 5 Rangsit University, Thailand held its 1st local sales competition

SEASAC is a three-year project funded by Erasmus+ Capacity Building in the field of higher education programme. This project aims to strengthen Southeast Asian Universities' capability to provide highly skilled B2B sales professionals for the emerging international markets. SEAMOLEC together with SEASAC Project partners has been collaborating in various programmes for the last 2 years. This project utilises existing European knowledge and experiences in developing a pedagogically rich concept for the cooperation of Universities and companies in sales education.

The SEASAC consortium consists of:

- Turku University of Applied Sciences, Finland 1.
- University of Applied Sciences Wiener Neustadt, Austria
- Edinburh Napier University, Scotland 3.
- 4. Haaga Helia University of Applied Sciences, Finland
- 5. Mahasarakham University, Thailand
- 6. Rangsit University, Thailand
- 7. Binus University, Indonesia
- 8. Universitas Putra Indonesia "YPTK" Padang, Indonesia
- 9. Sebelas Maret University, Indonesia
- 10. Parhayangan Catholic University, Indonesia
- 11. State Polytechnic Batam,
- 12. SEAMEO Regional Open Learning Centre (SEAMOLEC)

One way that can be used to improve students' sales skill is through a well-designed sales competition, where competitors (students) meet a buyer in a role-play setting. Students' performance is evaluated in 15-20 minutes simulated sales meetings by independent judges, based on preset evaluation criteria. The competition takes place in several stages: Qualifying Rounds, Semi-Final and Final.

A sales competition is an exciting interactive method of learning, which gives university students opportunities to learn from businesses. At the same time introducing both sides to potential recruitment opportunities. It involves a simulated buyer/ seller role-play and offer an exciting way for students to learn

practical skills derived from research that will have an impact on businesses and employability. Initially, the competition will be open only to students from SEASAC partners only, but in the future, we hope to open the competition to all universities and students within the South-East Asia region.



Pic 6. Role-play in SEASAC

In the role-play, students will have meeting with the buyer in a fifteen-minute 'sales discussion'. Often these are based on cases (simulated sales scenarios) submitted, or originated, in conjunction between the organizers and a sponsor. Sponsors and students will meet and practice in scenarios that simulate 'real-life'. Judges may come from the sponsoring company, academics, or other businesspeople. There are normally two rounds. Depending on the number of entrants and time available. Students who succeed in the first round are normally given a short time to prepare for a more in-depth interview in the final round.

According to testimonials from students who participated in this competition, it is believed to be beneficial to them in increasing their sales skills. The method is very powerful for the student and promotes their confidence and learning. Students are well prepared, as they have been given case studies, detail, and practice well in

advance. Opportunities for employers, students, and leaders in sales coaching and education to mix. In sum, sales competitions are an exceptional learning opportunity as well as great fun!

Common ASEAN Tourism Curriculum (CATC) Webinar Series

This programme was first initiated in November 2018 where SEAMOLEC conducted feasibility studies in 6 Southeast Asian countries; Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Philippines, Thailand, and Timor Leste. The studies aimed to find out the possibility for implementation of ODL programme in tourism sector by utilizing the Common ASEAN Tourism Curriculum (CATC) Toolboxes in various vocational schools in Southeast Asia region. Through the studies, SEAMOLEC gathered information related to the status of CATC implementation and seek for partnership with the institutions to support the ODL implementation. Result of the study can be accessed through this link: https://seamolec.org/researchreport.

The next step of this programmes is the CATC-based Online Courses Development and Implementation in Indonesia. Started with the initiation in Indonesia, which later will be expanded to other Southeast Asian countries, in 2021 SEAMEO SEAMOLEC invites 12 vocational high schools in tourism field, Centre of Quality Assurance Development for Vocational Education in the field of Business and Tourism, and industries, with support from Indonesian SEAMEO Centres and several units of MoEC. The next activities are to develop 21 competency units which will be presented in international webinar series and online course development.



Pic 7. The Launching of CATC International Webinar Series

The 12 Vocational High School Partners are:

- 1. SMKN 6 Yogyakarta
- 2. SMKN 1 Boyolangu
- 3. SMKN 9 Bandung
- 4. SMKN 57 Jakarta
- 5. SMKN 3 Malang
- 6. SMK Pariwisata Metland
- 7. SMKN 2 Batam
- 8. SMKN 27 Jakarta
- 9. SMK N 6 Palembang
- 10. SMKN 1 Probolinggo
- 11. SMKN 3 Denpasar
- 12. SMKN 2 Mataram

The international webinar series is prepared for 21 competency units and will be held in 2 sessions every week starting from February to July 2021. Teachers of the 12 vocational high school partners will be the resource persons and moderators of the webinar, delivering materials in English. Participants are opened for all vocational high schools, especially in tourism, but it will be opened too for other majors. In the near future, SEAMOLEC will invite and involve educational institutions from other Southeast

Asian countries as resource persons or participants.

This programme was officially launched on January 20, 2021, virtually. More than 200 participants joined the event, including teachers, students, representatives from industries, and representatives from several units of MoEC.

Detail information related to webinar schedule, topics, and resource persons, as well as the recorded sessions and slides can be accessed through SEAMOLEC official website: https://seamolec.org/catc.

This programme is prepared to support one of Educational Priority Programmes set by MoEC, called 'Merdeka Belajar'. The concept of 'Merdeka Belajar' is translated as in accordance with the objective of ODL which facilitates students to be able to study from anytime and anywhere, based on their talents, interests, and capabilities. SEAMOLEC expects this programme to be able to provide facilities for students to access learning resources.

Programmes for Public

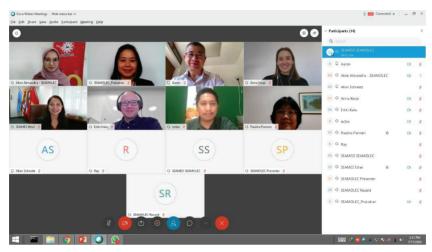
SEAMOLEC creates awareness to ODL for Public through its webinars conducted within national and international scope, with various interesting and relevant topics, as well as inviting high qualified resource persons. All SEAMOLEC webinars' recorded sessions can be accessed through this link: https://www.youtube.com/user/prmseamolec.

In 2020 SEAMOLEC has conducted 5 webinar events, as follows:

International Webinars on Educational Technology to Support Online Learning

In cooperation with its partners, Eduten Finland and Cahaya Utara Indonesia (CUI), SEAMOLEC jointly initiated the International Webinar on "Educational Technology to Support Online Learning" hosted on July 17, 2020. It was also supported greatly by the Embassy of Finland for Indonesia and the SEAMEO Secretariat in Bangkok. This programme is aimed to broaden

digital learning experience and perspective on the mentioned topic to benefit both teachers and learners.



Pic 8. International Webinars on Educational Technology to Support Online Learning

The four panelists presented in this international webinar were:

- Mr. Erkki Kaila, Ph.D, Head of Researcher, Eduten Co.Ltd, Lecturer, University of Turku, Finland
- Prof. Dr. Paulina Pannen, M.L.S, Interim Director of Innovation System, the Ministry of Research and Innovation of Republic of Indonesia
- Mr. Aaron Loh, Divisional Director, Educational Technology Division, the Ministry of Education, Singapore
- 4. Mr. M. Octaviano Pratama, Co-Founder and Chief Scientist, BISA AI, Indonesia

There were almost 2.500 participants who joined live on SEAMOLEC official YouTube account.

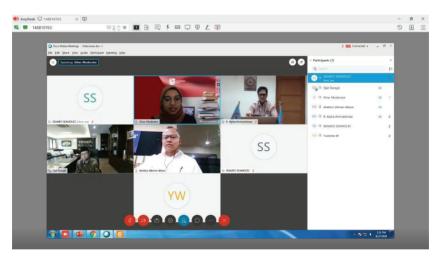
National Webinars on The Challenges of Distance Learning in the Era of New Normal

This webinar was conducted on August 27, 2020. This forum

was organized to provide information regarding problems encountered during distance learning and alternative solutions to cope with the situation.

The 3 resources persons were:

- Dr. Praptono, M.Ed., Director of Teacher and Education Personnel for Basic, Secondary and Special Education, the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia
- 2. Prof. Dr. Ojat Darojat, Rector of Open University of Indonesia
- 3. R. Alpha Amirrachman, Ph.D., Director of SEAMOLEC There were around 650 participants who joined live on SEAMOLEC official YouTube account.



Pic 9. National Webinars on The Challenges of Distance Learning in the Era of New Normal

International Webinar on "Learning from Southeast Asia: Response on Education in Coping with Covid-19"

As series of activities related to its 23rd GBM, SEAMOLEC hosted an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Webinar entitled "Learning from Southeast Asia: Response on Education in Coping with Covid-19" on October 20, 2020.

The panel session presented 4 speakers who are experts from 4 Southeast Asian countries, they were:

- 1. Assoc. Prof. Dr Wan Zuhainis Binti Saad from the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia
- 2. Ms Tham Yoke Chun from the Ministry of Education of Singapore
- 3. Asst. Prof Dr Anothai Ngamvichaikit from Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) of Thailand
- 4. Ms Hendri Puspa Martasari from ICT Center of the MoEC of Indonesia

International Webinar on Multimedia Utilization in Teaching History and Culture

Learning history and cultural heritage is most of the times considered dull and demotivating by young students. Probably this is because the learning process is disconnected from these students' reality and experience. One possible way to overcome this state of matters is to use technology in creating the materials of history and cultural heritage subject in a collaborative experimental approach to learning historical concepts of the traditional curriculum. Combining history teaching with technological tools and multimedia runs into the motivation of the students as they find the screen and gadgets as the most natural way to learn.

To broaden digital learning experience and perspective on teaching history and culture to benefit both teachers and learners, SEAMEO Regional Open Learning Centre (SEAMOLEC) under the coordination of SEAMEO Indonesian Centres Coordinator (ICC) and in cooperation with the Directorate General of Culture, as well as Research and Development Body of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) of Indonesia conducted the Webinar on Multimedia Utilization in Teaching History and Culture on October 21, 2020. On the other hand, this programme was also aimed to serve as a forum to share best practices from the Southeast Asia region.



Pic 10. International Webinar on Multimedia Utilization in Teaching History and Culture

This webinar used mixed language: English and Bahasa Indonesia in its different sessions according to each speaker. There were 2 main sessions, the first one was the opening and sharing session which was delivered in English, and the second session was the panel session which was delivered in Indonesian Language.

There were 9 speakers presented in 6 parts of the panel session, they were:

- 1. Fitra Arda, M.Hum, Director of Cultural Protection, MoEC
- Marlon Ririmasse, The Center for National Research of Archeology, MoEC
- 3. Jarwadi, M.Pd, The Center for Curriculum and Books, MoEC
- 4. Brigida Intan Printina, M.Pd, Lecturer, Sanatha Darma University, Yogyakarta
- 5. Alfan Pujo Laksono and Puryanto, Officers of IT Content and Knowledge Management, SEAMOLEC, Yohanna Novathalia, SEAMOLEC Intern.
- 6. Hirman Pratikto, History teacher, SMAN 2 Surabaya, and Drs. Adi Prawito, MSi, History teacher, SMAN 3 Malang International Webinar on Indonesia Sales Competition (ISAC): A First Step to Prepare Sales Professionals in Indonesia

In relation to the SEASAC Project, SEAMOLEC together with the Indonesian consortium partners agreed to have the competition for national scale business called Indonesia Sales Competition (ISAC). ISAC is a special competition arranged for Indonesian students conducted virtually using Zoom meeting and YouTube live as platforms on November 24-25, 2020. There were 20 students



Pic 11. International Webinar on Indonesia Sales Competition (ISAC): A First Step to Prepare Sales Professionals in Indonesia

ISAC committee also on a limited basis invited several lecturers from universities outside the consortium and representatives from the MoEC to participate as judges or observers in this competition. It aimed to prepare students to be highly skilled B2B sales professionals in Indonesia who understand the process and ethics in sales. Moreover, it will also be beneficial for industries and companies in Indonesia to obtain university graduates who are able to do sales, especially Business-to-Business (B2B) sales.

In the series of ISAC activities, an International Webinar was also held with the theme "Preparing Students Towards New Era of B2B Sales" which aimed to introduce various strategies in preparing future sales professionals in a new era of B2B sales. It was opened for public participation, especially lecturers, students, sales practitioners, and business stakeholders in Southeast Asia.

The event invited 3 speakers:

- 1. Benny Kusuma from Microsoft Indonesia
- 2. Harri Lappalainen from Turku University of Applied Sciences, Finland
- 3. Mr Watjana Poopanee from Mahasarakham University, Thailand

These events were prepared by UPI YPTK Padang and SEAMOLEC, also supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) of Indonesia, UNS, Binus, Polibatam, Unpar, Mahasarakham University, Thailand, and Turku University of Applied Sciences, Finland. The competition prizes were provided by the supporting sponsors: Gistrav Group, Bank Mandiri Syariah, Gojek, and Silungkang Art Center.

For more information related to SEASAC project and ISAC please visit the website: https://seasalescompetition.com/

Summary

Teachers, lecturers, and other educators are adjusting their best to the new normal. They are trying to connect virtually and finding online resources to help them teach better. SEAMOLEC feels grateful and humble to aid and facilitate educators to continue adapting during this pandemic attack. The centre wishes to continue providing the tools needed and creating access to various educational resources for educators within the region. •

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A Different Way of Celebrating Idul fitri

uslims worldwide will soon celebrate Idul Fitri, which marks an end to the holy month of Ramadan. The holiday is a much-awaited moment to express gratitude to God for finishing the month-long fasting.

Ramadan is the month for Muslims to spiritually reshape themselves into the best kind of human beings. Idul Fitri, therefore, is the day of victory for Muslims for being able to fight worldly desires by prioritizing worship to God and performing good deeds toward other human beings. As a reward, God offers grace and mercy.

But the COVID-19 pandemic still drags on for the second year running. From time to time, we have been shocked by the unexpected news of the passing of people around us, our colleagues, friends, even loved ones. Our WhatsApp groups were often full of condolence.

Due to the constant danger of COVID-19 transmission, the government has asked the people to thoroughly follow health protocols. Most recently, the government restricted breaking-of-the-fast gatherings involving crowds, banned *mudik* (exodus) and prohibited state officials from hosting post-Ramadan open houses.

Most offices, schools and universities have remained closed. Most people work and study from home with the help of information technology, prompting those without access to technology to suffer more. Worse still, we have been witnessing business collapse and people lose jobs. Perhaps the most painful adjustment is the band on *mudik*, a decades-old ritual that used to prelude Idul Fitri. Before the pandemic, millions of people left

cities for their hometowns and villages in order to celebrate Idul Fitri with their big families.

The ban is nevertheless a must to reduce the spread of the virus, which has reportedly mutated into a more deadly form. The cases of other countries such is in India show that the pandemic is far from over. What can we learn from this difficult situation?

First, *hifz al-nafs* (protection of life) must be taken as a foremost consideration. While the government does not forbid Eid prayer in an open field, health protocols must be strictly followed and the *mudik* ban must be followed. That means we cannot perform Eid prayer in our hometown, but in the neighborhood we currently reside. But if our neighborhood is classified as a red zone or high risk, then performing Eid prayer at home should be an option.

This should not reduce the sacred meaning of Idul Fitri celebration, as the holiday does not need to be celebrated in a festive mood, rather in a contemplative one. Thus the pandemic once again provides us with a chance to really go deeper into the meaning of Idul Fitri. We can solemnly ask ourselves; have we successfully reshaped ourselves into the best version of human beings?

Second, it is time to reinterpret and widen the definition of the needy. Ramadan has taught us to perform good deeds particularly toward the needy. During this pandemic, we have witnessed how stressed those infected by the virus were. Having to self-isolate at home or at a hospital with the possibility of death is certainly not a comfortable state. Helping to comfort them in any way such as providing food or logistical matters or taking care of their family members are good deeds that God would reward.

We can start by taking care of our neighbors who might have contracted the coronavirus. Community-based programs have become an important strategy to enhance health and safety and can serve as preemptive measure before we resort to professional ones. It is common now to have COVID-19 task force in our neighborhoods through which we can act and help together.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "The best neighbor to Allah is the best to his neighbor" (HR Tirmidhi). The Quran makes it clear that neighbors are entitled to kindness, whether they are related to us or not (An Nisaa:36).

Third, the government is no doubt in a difficult situation financially. The country plunged into its first recession in to decades in the third quarter of 2020 as the government struggled to contain the coronavirus outbreak and the attendant economic fallout. While Indonesia's economic growth is expected to modestly rebound this year, credit growth to Indonesian firms remains weak and the pandemic will continue to seriously dampen economic activities.

Thus, as the economy prospect remains gloomy, we have no option but to really tighten our belt. Consumption might help giving a boost to the economy, but every household has no option but to perform this in a calculated and modest manner.

Idul Fitri celebrations this year may not be extravagant and don't need to be in the future anyway. Nevertheless, it still provides us with a meaningful chance to spiritually reshape ourselves into at least better individuals, who have more sensitivity to help those really in need and to increase our resilience in dealing with the pandemic.

Eid Mubarak. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, May 12, 2021

School Reopening Requires Cautious Measures

and Karin Hulshof wrote that it was time for the school gates to re-open (The Jakarta Post, June 15, 2021). They argued that "school attendance is critical for children's education and lifetime prospects", "COVID-19 does not pose high risk to children, and that schools are not drivers of transmission", "children who are not in the classroom also experience increased loneliness, difficulty concentrating, and high level of leaning anxiety".

They warned that the longer schools remained closed, the worse these problems would become.

The fact is the pandemic is far from over. Indonesia has recently seen an upward trend of new confirmed cases, which on Thursday broke a record of 20.000. The new easily transmitted variant called Delta is believed to have caused the surge and will potentially reduce the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines by up to 33 percent, according to the Health Ministry.

Kasal and Hushof's argument with regard to children's relative immunity is also doubtful, particularly in Indonesia's case.

Just recently the Indonesian Pediatric Society (IDAI) revealed that COVID-19 cases in children aged 0 to 19 years reached 12.5 percent, which means that one in eight confirmed cases of COVID-19 is a child. The case fatality rate of COVID-19 in children is also the highest in the world, reaching 3-5 percent.

Hence, the government has no option but to prioritize the safety of our children and to strengthen distance education delivery mood. The perceived shortcomings of online learning pose a challenge for all stakeholders, including our education experts to improve. There are several measures we can pursue:

First, strengthen collaboration between the government and internet service providers. The government has made the right move by providing internet quota for lecturers, teachers and students.

But internet quota means nothing if there are still particular areas with no internet coverage. Therefore, the government and internet service providers need to build more infrastructure to make sure every area and corner of the country has reliable internet connection.

The government's ambitious infrastructure plan to build roads, bridges and highways should be temporarily halted, and the money should be reallocated to build infrastructure that makes a direct contribution to massive internet provision and the improvement of the pedagogical aspects.

It should be noted that distance education is not only internetbased, it can also be done through printed module and other multimedia and tele-learning modes such as television, radio, which the government has been doing but this is still not enough. More resources should be dedicated to improving and widening these efforts.

Second, education experts have to continuously devise methods that can make distance education not only effective and efficient but also joyful and meaningful. Distance education delivery is not simply moving our conventional classes onto Zoom or other teleconferencing apps. With various webinars and workshops mushrooming, teachers should have strong will to join them to improve their competency and professionalism.

Online learning does not mean that children should sit in front of their laptop listening to and watching their teachers all day long through video conference. Project-based learning involving surrounding communities should also be part of the learning process.

Some teachers have expressed concerns about whether onlinebased distance education can transfer values and shape desired students' characters. This is by no means a new issue.

Johnson and Williams (2010) in their book *The Phenomenon of Character Development in Distance Education Course* already wrote:"[...] students had experienced character development in a variety of ways: (a) performance character traits and strengths of self-discipline and self-directedness in learning, analytical and deeper approach to learning, imagination and creativity, ... (b) moral character traits and strengths of increasing moral desires, enhancing moral discernment, and moral courage; (c) relational character traits and strengths of open-mindedness, sharing learning with others, improving communication with others, ... and (d) spiritual character traits and strengths of humility, faith, hope, and charity" (p.14).

Last, schools in areas with relatively low cases of COVID-19 might try to have blended-learning, partial face-to-face mode using shifting methods with a limited number of students and with very clean and virus-free school environment. Most learning activities might also be held outdoors to ensure fresh air. Nevertheless, this should be conducted with extreme care and high discipline in adhering to heath protocols and a variety of contingency plans.

The supposed learning losses are not something that we can handle lightly. Hence, all pertinent stakeholders should work hand-in-hand to ensure that our children are still entitled to a decent education that would make them capable human beings in the future, while making sure that their safety is also an uncompromised matter during this pandemic. •

First published by The Jakarta Post, June 26, 2021

SEAMOLEC Facilitates Conversion of Online Education for Teachers

NESCO has reported that some 1.3 billion students around the world have been unable to attend school or university since March 23, 2020. The switch to online learning as prompted by the pandemic has deprived students of opportunities for development and improvement, with teachers also having to adapt to providing learning materials in online.

Nationwide efforts to adopt digital education, or using technology to deliver education and learning, are emerging and evolving quickly. The silver lining for the switch to digital education is undoubtedly digital literacy, specifically improvements in the capabilities of all education stakeholders in information and communication technology (ICT), as well as the acceleration of ICT proficiency in society. This is evidenced by the increasing numbers of free and meaningful webinars, online courses, online training programs, and much more.

SEAMEO Regional Open Learning Centre (SEAMOLEC) is one of the 26 centres available under the auspices of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO).

SEAMOLEC's work has focused on open and distance learning (ODL) since 1997 to enhance the quality of education in Southeast Asia, and the centre will celebrate its 25th anniversary in February 2022.

The centre is assisting SEAMEO member countries to find alternative solutions to enhance the quality of their people through ODL in a series of core programs that cover skills training, consulting, research and development, and information dissemination. SEAMOLEC's primary goal is to administer

relevant programs that are responsive to the current digital education needs of both individual nations and the region.

The centre has provided assistance to national and regional programs that support teachers and educators in overcoming the challenges of the pandemic by integrating and using ODL for learning continuity. While some teachers and institutions were not ready to deliver online learning, SEAMOLEC responded by providing a range of programs to help facilitate all education stakeholders, including educators, learners and the wider public.

Education workers moved their immersive learning experiences to virtual platforms, all the while conceptualizing and implementing new approaches to collaborative teaching and learning. Meanwhile, students developed digital competencies with the support of their parents, so they could engage in online learning without added anxiety in these already stressful times. Parents have also been driven to use technology more effectively in taking a key role in education delivery, boosting learner engagement and helping to facilitate digital education for their children as end users.

Teachers are constantly looking for best practices and the most efficient solutions in adapting to online learning as a "new normal". This involves finding digital education resources that help them deliver their classes online, which has proven difficult for some teachers. SEAMOLEC has been at hand to offer practical solutions and user-friendly innovations to instill new digital habits in teaching and learning.

Around 90 percent of all participants in SEAMOLEC's training programs, both online and offline, have been educators. The dual method of delivering its training programs is intended to help educators, no matter their level of digital proficiency, to improve their skills in applying ICT to teaching and learning. Armed with these skills, educators are able to deliver interscholastic collaborative learning across Indonesia and the Southeast Asian region.

Teachers, lecturers and other education professionals are doing their best in adjusting to digital transformation in the educational sphere. They are connecting with students, parents and colleagues virtually while discovering online resources to help them better deliver digital education. SEAMOLEC is grateful and humbled by this opportunity to assist and facilitate educators on their journey of digital adaptation. It is the centre's wish to continue providing the necessary tools and guidance, as well as generating access to various digital education resources, in support of all educators in the region.

The centre also provides a variety of activities to support students as they learn at home. The centre's key student support programs are the South-East Asian Sales Competition (SEASAC) and the Common ASEAN Tourism Curriculum (CATC) webinar series, which combine learning and fun towards real-life application for their futures.

For the wider public in the region, SEAMOLEC raises ODL awareness through its national and international webinars that offer a vast range of attractive and relevant topics delivered by highly qualified individuals. All recorded SEAMOLEC webinars are available to view on the SEAMEO SEAMOLEC YouTube account (www.youtube.com/user/prmseamolec).

To discover more, check out the SEAMOLEC website (www. seamolec.org). Be sure follow the centre's official social media accounts under the handles @ seameoseamolec (Instagram, Facebook) and @seamolec (Twitter). •

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Alpha Amirrachman was born in Jakarta, November 28, 1970. He completed Bachelor Degree in Education from Faculty of Education, Prof. Dr. Hamka Muhammadiyah University (1995-1999). He was granted Australian Development Scholarship, pursuing Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies with the courses of Organisational Theory, Management and

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He was head of Hikmah Division of Muhammadiyah Student Association (IMM) of Commissariat of IKIP Muhammadiyah Jakarta (1995-97), Head of Publication Division of Youth Islamic Study Club (YISC) Al-Azhar Jakarta, Secretary General of Indonesian Students' Association in Australia (PPIA) of New South Wales, Australia (2002-2004), Member of Division of Cadre and Human Resources Development of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah Youth (Pemuda Muhammadiyah) (2006-2010), Coordinator of Research Cluster of Mobility, Culture and Social Inequality, AISSR, Universiteit van Amsterdam (2008-2009), Treasurer of the Board of Muhammadiyah Special Branch (PCIM) in The Netherlands (2010-2012), Executive Director of the Centre for Dialogue and Cooperation among Civilisations (CDCC) under the leadership Prof. H. M. Din Syamsuddin, M.A. (2014-2016), Head of Language Center, Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University (2015-2016), Vice Chairperson of the Environmental Reservations and Natural Resources Division of the Central Board of Indonesia's Ulema Council (MUI) (2015-2020), Vice Chairperson of the Commission of Foreign Relations and International Cooperation, Central Board of Indonesia's Ulema Council (MUI) (2020-now), lecturer at Faculty of Education, Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University (2005-now), Special Advisor to Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Prof. Dr. H. Muhadjir Effendy, M.A.P. in the area of monitoring of policy implementation (2016-2018), Director of Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisations

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People, Culture, Education and Technology

Cultural convergence is inevitable in the life of a changing society. The perceived tendency of conservative views and attitudes in local communities as well as religious groups and other social groups as a result of the counter to globalization and modernization has resulted in 'conflicting values' in the lives of people. Industrialization has given birth to a mass culture that leads to a collective spirit in the value system, technology has demanded the application of technical methods in all fields, and urbanization has led to the collapse of the communal values of a traditional society. This is where the importance of maintaining cultural integration in cultural life, which is not always easy to do in the midst of people's lives that are changing with euphoria or feelings of excessive joy with all freedoms.

This book tried to capture the inevitability of cultural convergence in the life of the changing society through portraying journey of humanity and human development at certain part of the world, which is Asia, and more specifically Indonesia. The writer interviewed numbers of individuals with various backgrounds from politicians, academics, social activists to religious figures. Some are celebrities, some are just ordinary people. Their work for humanity and human development is simply beyond compare. Not only that, the book also provides us with analysis through the writer's op-eds, which show the debate around educational policies and the work to improve education in this era of 4.0 industrial revolution and in post-pandemic era in Indonesia.

Above all, this book can serve as a reference to reflect on the efforts of selected inspiring people in improving human development and how several dimensions of culture, education and technology are interrelated with each other in the journey towards a betterment and advancement of society.

Prof. Dr. H. Haedar Nashir, M.Si., Chairman of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah.

The good teacher is generous, open, tolerant. He inspires hope. Learning is always possible. Alpha Amirrachman is that teacher. As fear evermore drips bitterness into the heart, this book conveys a sweet lesson.

Prof. Gerry van Klinken, University of Amsterdam.

Anthropological approaches reveal invaluable insights 'behind the curtain'. The author combines his journalistic and academic skills to present us with intriguing and meaningful stories and analysis of societal development.

H.E. Drs. H. Hajriyanto Y. Thohari, M.A, Indonesia's Ambassador to Lebanese Republic.

The book gives us a unique perspective of how societies are changing due to tireless efforts of certain inspiring and visionary individuals. Asides from interesting features that he wrote, the writer also presents us with mind-blowing scrutiny of various imperative societal issues.

Prof. Dr. Azyumardi Azra, MA, CBE, Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta.





