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Islamic parties face uphill task

Karina M. Tehusijarana

THE JAKARTA POST/JAKARTA

The Islam-based Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) is seen as the most ideological and religiously conservative party in the country, and has often criticized President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo for actions it has deemed "anti-Islamic".

Recently, PKS executives have also come out against the proposed sexual violence bill for being "too liberal".

However, despite its Islamist image and numerous studies showing that religious conservatism is on the rise in Indonesia, this election season the party has mostly campaigned on abolishing annual taxes for motorcycles and removing the expiry dates on driver's licenses.

"We do not want to use identity politics," PKS legislative candidate Pipin Sopian told *The Jakarta Post* on Tuesday. "We want to employ the politics of ideas."

He claimed that on the campaign trail in his electoral district in West Java, which includes Bekasi, Purwakarta and Karawang, voters appreciated the party's campaign promises, which were in line with their aspirations for economic prosperity.

The PKS strategy is not without its reasons. One of them is the fact that religion apparently has not really been selling in the legislative election.

Several recent polls have shown a grim outlook for the nation's Islamic parties, revealing that many of the Islam-based parties contesting the 2019 legislative election might not even make it into the House of Representatives.

Four out of the five Islam-based parties — the PKS, the United Development Party (PPP), the National Mandate Party (PAN) and the Crescent Star Party (PBB) — have polled near or under 4 percent nationally, the minimum threshold to obtain House seats.

The National Awakening Party (PKB) is the only Muslim party that is relatively safe with poll numbers ranging from 8 to 9 percent.

"While rising conservative politicization of religion may have improved the bargaining power of religion-based parties in building coalitions, it does not seem to have had any significant electoral impact," director of Jakarta-based pollster Populi Center Usep S. Ahyar told the *Post*.

Religion not selling well in legislative election: Analyst

Islamic parties turn to other issues to get votes

"Religious issues don't really sell in legislative elections," he said, adding that the PKB's better electoral performance was mostly a result of the "coattail effect" provided by chairman Muhaimin Iskandar's aggressive pursuit of Jokowi's vice-presidential slot last year.

"In presidential and regional head elections, candidates are more open to individual character attacks because they are the main focus," Usep said. "But in the legislative elections, it's more difficult to claim that a certain party is more Islamic than another party."

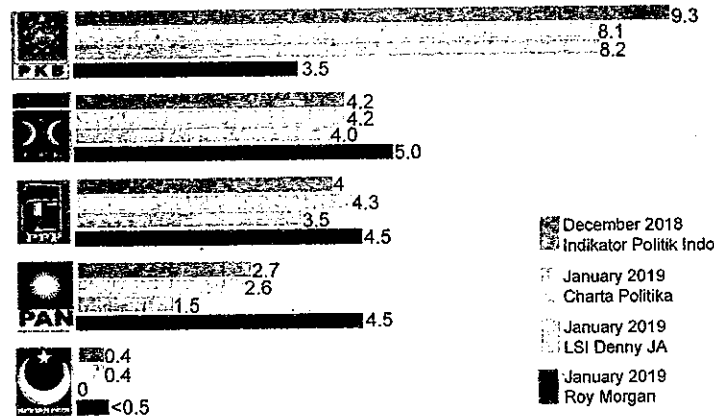
He said that nationalist parties had also coopted religious rhetoric and some, like the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), even had their own Islamic wings.

"It is harder for Islamic parties to use religion as a selling point, which is why some like the PKS opt to campaign on other issues."

Firman Noor, head of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) Political Research Center, said that studies also showed that a person's level of piety did not necessarily correlate with their political preference.

Research published last year by Indonesian pollster Saiful Mujani and political scientist Thomas Pepinsky suggested that Islamic parties only had an edge over nationalist parties if their economic policies were considered favorable, even among more pious voters.

Polling of Islamic parties



"We also have a long history, since 1959, of separating politics from religious norms," Firman said, adding that current Islamic parties also lacked the compelling figures and financial clout that some nationalist parties had.

"I think the voters at the grass roots are becoming increasingly pragmatic and want tangible things instead of just values and ideology."

PPP secretary-general Arsul Sani acknowledged that his own party had shifted from campaigning on "purely faith-based Islamic issues" to issues that "contextualized Islam into issues such as the economy and education".

Arsul added one of the reasons was because of the large number of young people set to vote in the upcoming elections.

"Millennials are concerned about things that directly affect them, such as education and opportunities for entrepreneurship, so we have to adapt to our constituents."

Despite the low poll numbers, Arsul, Pipin and PAN secretary-general Eddy Soeparno remain confident that their parties will make it into the House. "We are sure that 2019 will be the turning point for PKS success," Pipin said.

"We are not worried," Eddy told the *Post*.

Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) researcher Arya Fernandes said he was certain the PKB, PKS, PPP and PAN would all make it to the House because their vote share had remained steady since 2004.

"But I think that for now and the near future, Islamic parties will remain mid-table parties because nationalist parties are more flexible and able to address different issues at the local level."

Are we in the shallow now?

False claims against President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, that he is a communist, a Chinese descendant, a non-Muslim or a bad Muslim, are making the rounds again in the run up to the April 17 presidential race. But unlike in the 2014 election, when the negative campaigns were waged largely on the internet, this time they are also being conducted door to door.

But Jokowi, or rather his supporters, are not completely blameless for making this year's general election shallower than the last one, by leaning more toward trivialities than substance.

A case in point was when Prabowo Subianto, the lone challenger to Jokowi, during the second presidential debate struggled over a question about unicorns, Jokowi supporters had a field day over the next 48 hours making viral memes portraying him as a candidate out of touch with millennials.

entertained by issues that hardly have any impact on people's lives.

Paraphrasing Lady Gaga's words, "we are in the shallow now".

Blaming voters, as some are wont to do, by saying that they are giving what voters want to hear and that people are not so interested in the serious stuff, comes across as arrogant and an insult to people's intelligence. Dumbing down campaign themes assumes that people are stupid.

Blame the internet? The campaign teams and their die hard supporters have turned the internet into a powerful weapon to divert the nation's attention away from the real problems, engaging them in mundane and trivial issues. This is as bad as those who are weaponizing fake news for political goals.

Free speech, an inseparable part of democratic elections, has been used by politicians and their supporters largely to trade barbs, whether in the debates or on so-

They highlighted Prabowo's remarks "Unicorn? You mean those online things?" but ignored the second part of his answer, which legitimately addressed the issue.

On land reform, which came up during the same debate, the focus afterward turned to how many tracts of lands were controlled, not just by Prabowo, but also by some members of Jokowi's inner circle. Few people viewed land reform as a means of addressing wealth inequality, the reason why Jokowi began the program two years ago to give out land certificates and hence empower the poor.

Lately, the nation has been engaged in an endless debate about the word *kafir*, which means infidel but is also often used in the Quran to address non-Muslims. This was sparked when Nahdlatul Ulama, the country's biggest Muslim organization, urged people not to use the word in the current election campaign, be-

cause it has the potential to alienate non-Muslims or even divide Muslims.

Like what they see in the election campaigns.

Since voting is not compulsory, and April 17 is a national holiday which will be followed by another national holiday to celebrate Good Friday on April 19, those who have been turned off by the tone of the current election campaigns may decide to leave town. Watch the voter turnout for it says a lot about what people think about the current election.

It may be too late to salvage the 2019 election to turn it into a more meaningful practice of our democratic process of electing our leader. But there are valuable lessons learned. At least we know that the political system, its institutions and the attitude of most of our politicians, all need serious fixing.

This is something we can take away today as we look forward to 2024, and staying with Lady Gaga, hopefully we can then sing "We're far from the shallow now".

COMMENTARY



Endy M. Bayuni

THE JAKARTA POST/
JAKARTA

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Skepticism rises over Jokowi's plans

JAKARTA: Indonesian economists and opposition officials have questioned the feasibility of President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's plan for cash handouts to the unemployed, citing an already strained national budget and ballooning debt at state enterprises.

Jokowi, who is seeking reelection in April, promised cash benefits last week to graduates from poor families and the unemployed if he won a second term, but did not sketch in the details.

Some opposition figures see the plan, widely known as the "pre-work card", as a populist exercise to garner votes ahead of the April 17 presidential election, expected to be a rerun of his 2014 race with a retired general, Prabowo Subianto.

"The program will increase the state's burden and will be funded by new debt," said economist Bhima Yudhistira Adhinegara of the Institute for Development of Economics and Finance, pointing to a deficit in the budget and a low tax ratio.

Indonesia aims to hold its fiscal deficit at about 1.84 percent of GDP this year, or roughly Rp 296 trillion (US\$21 billion), up from 1.76 percent of GDP, or about Rp 260 trillion, in 2018. Unemployment, standing at 7 million by August 2018, ranks among Southeast Asia's highest, and makes up about 5 percent of the population, government data shows. Most of these individuals are graduates of vocational schools.

Indonesia would need to find Rp 84 trillion each year if the government decided to pay out Rp 1 million a month to so many, Adhinegara said.

Jokowi has also promised subsidized food for poor families and a program to ensure higher education for high school graduates.

The plans will be an extension of existing schemes set to cost the government about Rp 72 trillion this year. - Reuters

Italy hopes to strengthen cooperation with Indonesia

Dian Septiari

THE JAKARTA POST/JAKARTA

Celebrating the 70th anniversary of bilateral relations with Indonesia, the Italian Embassy is hosting an exhibition on the European country's unique strength of fusing science and technology with its artistic traditions.

The Beauty of Knowledge exhibition, which is open to the public until March 31 at the National Museum in Central Jakarta, was unveiled by Italian Ambassador to Indonesia Vittorio Sandalli and Deputy Foreign Minister AM Fachir on Tuesday evening.

"Italy has had an intense and rewarding relationship with Indonesia for 70 years. We hope this exhibition can inspire the two countries to further expand their cooperation in various fields and generate new opportunities to foster the prosperity and well-being of their people," Sandalli said.

The exhibition involves Italy's

National Research Council as well as its four main science museums: Fondazione Idis-Città della Scienza in Naples, Museo Galileo Galilei in Florence, Museo delle Scienze-Muse in Trento and Museo Nazionale Scienza e Tecnologia Leonardo da Vinci in Milan.

Nicola Bianchi, scientific attaché at the Italian Embassy to Singapore who had traveled to Jakarta for the exhibition, said the event aimed at "conveying the non-traditional, creative and dynamic collisions that make up the Italian research system — combining knowledge with the artistic tradition of Italy".

"Throughout the different exhibition sections, the 'Renaissance spirit' is highlighted as a vital and significant component of past and current research and innovation in Italy," she said.

The exhibition covers five main sectors that Italy is also seeking to improve with Indonesia: health, the environment, space, food and

nutrition, as well as culture and heritage, for which Italy is particularly renowned.

"One that we are already cooperating in is the restoration of cultural heritage. It is precisely the sector where you can find the combination between art, culture

and science because if you want to be a researcher or restorer of cultural heritage, you must know about chemistry, biology and physics," Sandalli said.

"In Yogyakarta, we have one of our researchers who is now restoring — thanks to the decision of His Royal Highness Sultan of Yogyakarta — two paintings of the famous Indonesian painter Raden Saleh."

More broadly, Sandalli said Italy wanted to have more cooperation agreements in the energy sector with Indonesia.

"Italy is [a leader in] geothermal technology as five active volcanoes in Europe are in Italy. So, we really have a lot of experience in geothermal technology, lasting more than 150 years. This is one sector [in which] we can cooperate with Indonesia," he said.

Dino Kusnadi, the Foreign Ministry's director for Europe's region I, said that this year, Jakarta would renew various mem-

orandums of understanding (MoU) with Italy to adapt to the latest development in Indonesia, including the reorganization of ministries some four years ago.

"An old MoU, for example, covers issues under education, culture, research and technology. But now that we have two separate ministries for them, we must renew [the MoU]," Dino said.

He was referring to the Education and Culture Ministry and the Research, Technology and Higher Education Ministry, which were reorganized by President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo in late 2014.

"We are currently working on [new MoUs] one by one," Dino said, adding that this would not affect ongoing bilateral ties.

Indonesia-Italy relations began with Italy's recognition of Indonesia on Dec. 29, 1949. Indonesia opened its mission in Rome in March 1952, while Italy opened its embassy to Indonesia in Jakarta in October 1951.



JP/Dhoni Setiawan

Virtual insanity: Deputy Foreign Minister AM Fachir (*right*) tries out a pair of virtual reality (VR) goggles as Italian Ambassador to Indonesia Vittorio Sandalli (*left*) and Communications and Information Minister Rudiantara (*second right*) look on during the "Beauty of Knowledge" exhibition in Jakarta, on Wednesday.

Korea, ASEAN —

Friends with heart-to-heart understanding

Next week, I will be making state visits to Brunei, Malaysia and Cambodia. I am very pleased that ASEAN member states will be the destination of my first overseas tour this year.

ASEAN always reminds me of the sea that nurtured and raised me. I grew up in Busan, the largest port city of the Republic of Korea. My parents were displaced from their hometown, and it was the inclusiveness and understanding of those who lived with the sea that took in my impoverished family. From them, I was able to learn a lesson of courage and hope that no matter how harsh the storm and waves, we can weather them if we gather our strengths.

Most ASEAN member states not only lie by the sea but also possess infinite wisdom and power stemming from the sea. Among these, ASEAN's openness and inclusiveness are particularly astounding. Diverse religions, thoughts and civilizations coexist harmoniously while respecting each other.

Their levels of economic development and political systems vary, but they have pioneered the

"ASEAN way" that guarantees equal participation and opportunities within the community.

The efforts of ASEAN people toward unity and mutual benefits have accomplished regional stability and peace as well.

It was never by chance that ASEAN member states hosted both of the historic North Korea-United States summits aimed at dismantling the world's last remaining Cold War rivalry. ASEAN is at the forefront of endeavors to usher in an era of Asia marked by peace and coexistence.

In its quest for people-centered growth, ASEAN has now grown into the world's youngest and most dynamic community. As a mega market with a total population of 640 million and a gross domestic product of US\$2.7 trillion, it boasts a potential annual growth rate of 5 percent with a median age of 30 years. While practicing the inclusive growth that the whole world is pursuing, ASEAN is setting an example that peace will directly lead to economic prosperity.

I send my respect to our

out, ASEAN member nations dispatched troops to fight with us for freedom and peace. When the whole of Asia was reeling from the 1997 financial crisis, countries in the region joined forces and surmounted it together.

As friends with heart-to-heart understanding, ASEAN and Korea feel a natural attachment to each other, holding each other dear. Many Koreans enjoy Southeast Asian cuisine, and many countries in the region make ideal destinations for family vacations.

In September 2017, the first ASEAN Culture House for one of ASEAN's 10 dialogue partners opened in Busan, my hometown. Many Koreans frequent the House to better understand and familiarize themselves with ASEAN. It is truly welcome news that K-pop is received well by many people in ASEAN and the demand for Korean electronic goods and cosmetics is high there.

We can usher in a more prosperous and peaceful future. ASEAN leaders and I share a future vision encapsulated by such keywords as people, prosper-

ity and peace. I have announced the New Southern Policy, which incorporates various measures for cooperation aimed at bringing about our vision, and have launched the Presidential Committee on New Southern Policy made up of various government ministries and agencies.

Recently, concrete results from cooperation have been coming into sight. Last year, the number of visitors traveling between ASEAN countries and Korea surpassed 10 million for the first time, and bilateral trade recorded a new high at \$160 billion.

Our cooperation will further expand into other areas going forward, including advanced science and technology, information and communication technology, transport, energy and the defense industry. Our cooperation will also make constructive contributions to strengthening connectivity in the region, a goal pursued by ASEAN.

This is a very meaningful year in that it marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of dialogue relations between ASEAN

INSIGHT



Moon Jae-in
SEOUL

ASEAN friends.

Surrounded by the sea on three sides, Korea also has openness, inclusiveness and innovation in its DNA. I am convinced that ASEAN and Korea, with so much in common, are optimal partners, playing off each other's strengths. We will make up for what the other lacks and maximize the outcome of cooperation.

We have already shared profound friendship for a long time. Knowing how challenging it is to find the ways to survive among world powers, we have been one of the first to lend a helping hand to countries in crisis.

When the Korean War broke

and Korea. To celebrate, the ASEAN-Republic of Korea Commemorative Summit will be held in Korea at the end of this year. I hope that it proves an opportunity to bring the future vision of creating a people-centered community of peace and prosperity closer to reality. I am confident that when ASEAN and Korea join forces, we will be able to enjoy unprecedented happiness, prosperity and peace that we have never experienced before.

Last, I especially express my sincere gratitude to all the people of ASEAN who helped bring an atmosphere of peace and harmony to the Korean Peninsula. The Korean people who have long aspired to peace will never forget the friendship ASEAN has shown to us. I look forward to peace on the Korean Peninsula leading to peace and prosperity in all of Asia.

The writer is president of the Republic of Korea. He contributed this article to Asia News Network members ahead of visits to Brunei, Malaysia and Cambodia.

New port for export hub ready for launch

Apriadi Gunawan

THE JAKARTA POST/KUALA TANJUNG, NORTH SUMATRA

Kuala Tanjung Port in Batubara regency, North Sumatra, which is touted to be Indonesia's largest port next to the country's main gateway, Tanjung Priok Port in North Jakarta, is to soon be in full operation.

President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo is planning to soon inaugurate the new port, which is to serve as an international hub for the western areas of the archipelago and is expected to help boost the region's export activities and tourist industry.

Coordinating Maritime Affairs Minister Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan said the port, which was already in use, was ready for official inauguration.

"The Kuala Tanjung Port has begun operations. The President will hopefully inaugurate the port in two or three weeks from now after we fix some problems at the port," Luhut told reporters during his visit to the port last week.

Luhut said the Kuala Tanjung port was expected to reduce logistic costs, which in turn would decrease commodity prices by 35 to 55 percent.

He also expressed hope that the port would boost North Sumatra's tourism sector. Despite acknowledging there was insufficient tourism infrastructure, he said cruise ships could now drop anchor at the port.

"The depth of the water at the port is about 16 to 17 meters mean low water spring, meaning that big ships, including cruise ships with 3,000 to 5,000 passengers, can now moor there," Luhut said, adding that he had asked Transportation Minister Budi Karya Sumadi to optimize the development of the Kuala Tanjung Port's tourism potential.

A number of cruise ships dropped anchor at the Kuala Tanjung Port last year, bringing in tourists from Malaysia, Singapore and Australia. Aside from visiting Southeast Asia's largest lake, Lake Toba, the foreign tourists also visited tourist attractions in Medan, the capital of the North Sumatra province, which had 231,465 foreign tourist arrivals last year.

In terms of export activities, a Taipei-based Wan Hai Line vessel weighing 50,000 gross tons had moored twice at the port to

New port to serve as international hub, boost exports, tourism

Port to reduce length of time to move shipments: minister

transport products from the region to China. It was the largest ship to have docked at any seaport on Sumatra.

The Wan Hai 507 vessel, with a capacity of 4,500 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs), moored for the first time at the Kuala Tanjung Multipurpose Terminal on Dec. 27 last year to transport 205 TEUs of crude palm oil derivative products.

The vessel, with a length overall of 268 meters, moored for the second time at the port on Feb. 14 to transport 261 TEUs of similar products.

Transportation Minister Budi Karya Sumadi said the Kuala Tanjung Port would help reduce the length of time to move shipments. Shipping goods from Sumatra through Kuala Tanjung to Shanghai in China, for example, could now take eight days, as compared to the 12 days needed from the nearby Belawan Port.

State-owned port company Pelindo 1's operational and commercial director, Syahputera Sembiring, said the port, which had a terminal with a capacity of 600,000 TEUs, was equipped with modern infrastructure, including an integrated information technology system.

"We have facilitated the multipurpose terminal with electric cranes, each with a capacity to lift containers of up to 45 feet," he said.

He said facilities with advanced technology at the terminal would ease the loading and unloading of goods. The facilities include three ship-to-shore cranes, eight automated rubber-tired gantry cranes, two mobile harbor cranes, 21 truck terminals and terminals for containers and dry bulk goods.

The multipurpose terminal has a 30,000-square-meter dock, a 2.8-kilometer trestle for four truck lanes with a width of 18.5 meters and four lines of 20.32-centimeter pipe racks.

"We expect the Kuala Tanjung Port to boost North Sumatra's economy and lower logistics costs," Syahputera said. (ars)

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Police charge activist for criticizing military

Marguerite Afra Sapiie

THE JAKARTA POST / JAKARTA

In what some have called a setback to the country's democracy, the police have arrested and charged Robertus Robet, a university lecturer and prodemocracy activist, for singing a song that allegedly insulted the military.

The sociologist from Jakarta State University (UNJ), who is known as an outspoken government critic, chanted an old marching song, which had been used to criticize the Indonesian Military (TNI) during the New Order era, at a weekly Kamisan protest in front of the Presidential Palace in Jakarta on Feb. 28.

He was apprehended by the police early on Thursday morning for questioning and later named



Antara

Robertus Robet

a suspect and charged under Article 207 of the Criminal Code for insulting those in power or legal institutions.

His arrest, which came amid controversies over President Joko

"Jokowi" Widodo's administration's plan to allow active military personnel to occupy civilian positions, has been widely condemned by activists and scholars who said it violated the principles of democracy.

Yati Andriyani, the coordinator of the Commission for the Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras) and one of Robertus' lawyers, said that her client had explained during the questioning that his criticisms during the rally in relation to military reform were constructive.

"[Robertus] is greatly concerned with Indonesia having a strong military, [he wants to] strengthen civil supremacy [...]. His statement was not aimed at discrediting the military, but instead to push for the TNI to be more professional," Yati told *The Jakarta Post*.

Robertus, an activist from the 1998 protests and cofounder of Amnesty International Indonesia, participated in the Kamisan gathering, where protesters rallied against the government's plan to place military officers in ministries and state institutions to address overstaffing issues.

The plan has been criticized for opening the door to the return of the military's *dwifungsi* (dual function) of Soeharto era, when the military was involved in almost every aspect of civilian life.

The song Robertus sang during the Kamisan, which was recorded and uploaded to YouTube, was commonly sung by student activists during rallies in 1998 to protest ABRI, the acronym of the military during the New Order era.

Prodemocracy activists have demanded the police immediately drop the case and free Robertus without any charges.

"The arrest was not only a violation of the right to freedom of expression, but it proved that the New Order's style of silencing dissent still exists," Amnesty International researcher Papang Hidayat said.

National Police spokesperson Brig. Gen. Dedi Prasetyo said the report against Robertus was drafted by the police, who found an indication that his statement at the Kamisan had caused a disruption to public order.

The police's statement, however, contradicted legal campaigner Bivitri Susanti's claim that Robertus was reported to the police by former TNI general chief of staff Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Johannes Suryo Prabowo.

Robertus was released following nearly 18 hours of questioning on Thursday.

"The freedom to express one's opinion publicly, as regulated by Law no. 9/1998 on freedom of expression in public spaces, is not absolute, but limited," said Dedi.