

PERSPECTIVE

RESEARCHERS AT ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE ANALYSE CURRENT EVENTS

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General Gatot and the Re-emergence of Pribumi-ism in Indonesia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- General Gatot Nurmantyo, the Commander of the Indonesian Armed Forces, has revived the issue of pribumi-ism (Indigenism) and social inequality in Indonesian society.
- Gatot will retire next year and many believe will run for high political office in 2019.
- Gatot's recent political speeches and his apparent links to political Islam give implicit encouragement to radical Islam and growing inter-ethnic intolerance in Indonesia.
- Indications that pribumi-ism and radical Islam are on the political rise include the establishment of the Pribumi Party; the proposal to re-introduce indigenism into the Indonesian Constitution; and Ahok's defeat in the recent Jakarta election.
- If unchecked, pribumi-ism can undercut political and communal stability again.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of Indonesian *pribumi* (or Indonesia *asli* as it was called earlier, meaning: Indonesian indigenous people) is re-emerging in Indonesia. This time, it was brought up in a speech by General Gatot Nurmantyo, the Commander of the Indonesian Armed Forces, given at the National Leadership Conference of the Golkar Party on 22 May 2017 held in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan.

At the event, when General Gatot was asked to talk about the unity of Indonesia and its challenges and dangers, he took the opportunity to discuss mass immigration from less developed and poorer countries to developed and richer countries and how these countries attempt to stop this flow of migrants. He argued that Indonesia would also become the target for such migration, and used the cases of Native Americans and Australian Aborigines being overwhelmed by immigrants. Finally he recited a poem by Denny JA, entitled “But They Are Not Ours”,¹ using its first 32 lines. It depicts the large social-economic gap as seen through the eyes of a poor young Indonesian named Jaka.² Below are some of the lines in English translation:

Please look, the paddy is ripe
the surrounding is nice
this village is super rich
But they are not ours

Please look, many types of merchandize
people sell and buy
how prosperous this place is
But they are not ours

Jaka has been stunned
he does not know why
his tears are dropping
Those tears are his

Gatot was later asked why he read the poem and what he wanted to achieve. He answered that he wanted to show that in certain areas, there is tremendous social injustice and that “we need to be vigilant.” If not, his children and other Indonesian children would be like Jaka.

¹ See <https://www.eramuslim.com/berita/nasional/puisi-tapi-bukan-kami-punya-oleh-denny-ja.htm> (Accessed 6 June 2017). The full text of Denny JA’s poem consists of 87 lines. It depicts Jaka, a Indonesian young man from the village, who led a demonstration to protest against social injustice. He was called to the police station for interrogation but was eventually released as the police became sympathetic towards him.

² Gatot only read the first 32 lines of Denny’s poem.

The video of Gatot and the poem went viral on social media.

There were various reactions to Gatot's poetry-reading. The chairman of the PDI-P Central Board Andreas Parera noted that as the Commander of the Indonesian military, Gatot should not have read a poem that has multiple possible interpretations,³ and should instead have stuck to his job and talked about the role of the military. The deputy chairman of opposition party Gerindra, Sufmi Dasco Ahmad, on the other hand claimed that Gatot was concerned with the current situation and wanted to tell the political elite about the problem.⁴ A politician of the opposition Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), Mahfudz Siddiq, said that Gatot was commenting on the "core issue of the Indonesian nation".⁵

Two Indonesian political scientists presented, during interviews for Metro TV, some most interesting interpretations. Sjamsuddin Haris of Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) argued that both the Golkar Party and General Gatot may have common objectives at the moment. Golkar requires a prominent figure for the 2019 presidential election, while Gatot will be retired next year and will need a political vehicle to participate in the election.⁶

In turn, Dr Djayadi Hanan of the Paramadina University maintained that it is possible that he is preparing for his post-retirement job, as there is still no prominent figure who can represent the Golkar Party as vice-presidential candidate.⁷ The Metro TV commentator noted that there is a rumour going around that Gatot may want to be a vice-presidential candidate (running alongside Jokowi), although he denied it.⁸

GATOT'S INTEREST IN POLITICS

To be sure, General Gatot has generally been giving the impression of being politically active. For instance, on 4 June 2017, soon after the poetry reading, he made another political speech at the Mosque of Islamic Centre of the Ahmad Dahlan University, Yogyakarta, in which he argued that democracy as practised in Indonesia today is "no longer suitable for Pancasila" because the decision was made through "voting," not "deliberation and

³ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIObxaXSJnU> (Accessed 6 June 2017)

⁴ See <https://anekainfounik.net/2017/05/23/puisi-panglima-tni-di-rapimnas-golkar-dikritik-pdip-tapi-dipuji-gerindra/> (Accessed 6 June 2017).

⁵ See <http://politik.rmol.co/read/2017/05/23/292406/Panglima-Mengingatkan-Inti-Masalahnya-Adalah-Kesenjangan-Sosial-Ekonomi-> (Accessed 6 June 2017)

⁶ See <http://video.metrotvnews.com/play/2017/05/24/705132/panglima-tni-bacakan-puisi-denny-ja-di-rapimnas-golkar> (Accessed 5 June 2017)

⁷ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIObxaXSJnU> (Accessed 6 June 2017)

⁸ See <http://video.metrotvnews.com/play/2017/05/24/705132/panglima-tni-bacakan-puisi-denny-ja-di-rapimnas-golkar> (Accessed 5 June 2017)

consensus (Musyawarah-mufakat)". Furthermore, it did not result in "social justice for all the people of Indonesia", which is the fifth principle of Pancasila.⁹

General Gatot's comments on democracy and Pancasila did not go unnoticed. Syamsuddin Haris of LIPI said that the General had misunderstood democracy, and more importantly, a military leader would be better off confining himself to military and security affairs rather than being involved in politics. Otherwise, it may be misunderstood that the military would like to re-enter politics.¹⁰

An MP from the PDI-P, Charles Honoris, also noted that General Gatot had recently been involving himself in politics: "As he is still an active General, it would be more appropriate if he confined himself to military and security affairs."¹¹

Gatot's political interests can also be seen in the lecture that he gave to the Forum Keluarga Alumni Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (Fokal IMM or The Forum of Alumni of University Students' Association of Muhammadiyah) on 28 December 2016. He commented then on the blasphemy case against then-Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), saying that the movement demanding Ahok to be jailed was genuine and came from the "hearts of the Islamic Community" (nurani umat Islam).¹²

In the same lecture, Gatot mentioned a conversation he had had with Habib Rezieq Shihab, the leader of the radical Front Pembela Islam (FPI, the Islamic Defenders' Front), who telephoned him out of the blue to report that the story going around that the military had arrested and tortured him was a hoax. Apparently, Rezieq told Gatot that he was loyal to Indonesia. The general has since asked his intelligence officers to identify the source of the fake news and to stop it. The episode suggests warming relations between the two individuals.¹³

General Gatot's association with the FPI is being looked into by several analysts. A link back to the 2 December 2016 demonstration against Ahok has been pointed out. Jokowi and his team went along with meeting the demonstrators at the National Monument (Monas). Unlike Jokowi and others who wore the pici (Indonesian black hat), Gatot wore the white Muslim hat generally worn by hard-line Muslims. Gatot was criticized for showing

⁹<http://regional.kompas.com/read/2017/06/05/15265481/panglima.tni.sebut.demokrasi.indonesia.tak.sesuai.pancasila> (Accessed 6 June 2017)

¹⁰ See <http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-40158009> (Accessed 7 June 2017). After the fall of Suharto, the Indonesian military is supposed to have returned to the barracks.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nneF8nupw28> (Accessed 7 June 2017).

¹³ It is interesting to note that at the speech, Gatot depicted the details of their conversation which sounds like that of two old friends. Gatot refers to Rezieq as "Ulama Besar" (Great Ulema) and "Bib" (The abbreviation of Habib), showing both respect and closeness.

solidarity with the demonstrators but he defended this by saying that this was meant to prevent Jokowi from being attacked by the demonstrators.¹⁴

THE RECENT RISE OF PRIBUMI-ISM

In the poem recited by Gatot, there was no mention of “non-pribumi or foreigners”. However, in the present context, most Indonesians would associate the poem with the “non-pribumi’s domination” of the Indonesian economy at the expense of the “pribumi population”.

Indonesian pribumi-ism originated after Indonesia’s independence, with the governing elite dividing the population into *asli* and *non-asli* (i.e. pribumi and non-pribumi). Ethnic Chinese belonged to the non-pribumi group as did people of Arab origins. Since the Suharto era, however, the latter were in practice considered “pribumi” due to their sharing the same religion with the majority of the pribumi.

Pribumi-ism had already emerged during recent Jakarta gubernatorial and presidential elections, and racial and religious issues were used twice in attempts to discredit Jokowi. The first time was during the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election when Jokowi was paired with Ahok to be the governor and deputy governor of Jakarta. Jokowi was criticised for choosing a Chinese Christian as running mate.¹⁵ The second time was during the 2014 presidential election, when the Prabowo camp launched a smear campaign falsely accusing Jokowi of being an ethnic Chinese and a Christian.¹⁶

In August 2015, a group, including retired army general Djoko Santoso, who was linked to the Gerindra party, established the Partai Priboemi (Pribumi Party). The new party declared ambitions of restricting the political and economic rights of non-indigenous Indonesians.¹⁷

¹⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKZ_adJccDY (Accessed 8 June 2017) In this talk-show staged by Kompas TV, Gatot explained his position on the issue.

¹⁵ For an analysis of the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election, see Hui Yew Foong & Ikrar Nusa Bakti, “The Gubernatorial Race in Jakarta: Background and Implications”, ISEAS Perspective, 1 November 2012

¹⁶ <https://news.detik.com/berita/2601302/pkb-kita-berjuang-menangkal-fitnah-pada-jokowi> (Accessed 6 June 2017); <https://newrepublic.com/article/118613/indonesia-election-results-2014-joko-jokowi-widodo-nail-biter> (Accessed 8 June 2017).

¹⁷ <https://www.merdeka.com/politik/deklarasi-partai-priboemi-minta-negara-lindungi-bangsa-sendiri.html> (Accessed 6 June 2017);

<http://www.antaraneews.com/foto/88148/deklarasi-partai-priboemi> (Accessed 6 June 2017).

PRIBUMI-ISM AND THE 1945 CONSTITUTION

Ahok was defeated in the 2017 gubernatorial election on religious and racial grounds. This was despite the fact that the probability of Ahok being elected, before the blasphemy case was started against him, was very high. Rumours had it then that once elected, Ahok might become Jokowi's vice-presidential candidate in 2019.

There were apparently calls for the Indonesian Constitution to be amended in order to prevent Ahok from eventually running for vice-president. On 3 October 2016, during the National Working Conference of the United Development Party (PPP), an Islamic party, its chairman Romahurmuziy proposed to restore the clause "the president of Indonesia must be an 'indigenous Indonesian' (*orang Indonesia asli*)" back into the Constitution.¹⁸ He also asked that this criterion be applied to both presidential and vice-presidential candidates.

It was after the fall of Suharto that the Constitution was amended to be more relevant for modern and democratic Indonesia. Article 6 clause 1 now reads: "the presidential and vice-presidential candidates must be an Indonesian citizen by birth and never voluntarily obtain the citizenship of another country."¹⁹ Any Indonesian citizen who meets this criterion can be the presidential or vice-presidential candidate. This amendment also accorded with the Indonesian anti-racial discrimination law promulgated after the Suharto era.

Despite PPP's proposal to re-amend the constitution, its leadership has not given the details about what is meant by "*Orang Indonesia asli*". The Chairman of PDI-P Central Executive Council, Hendrawan Supratikno, when asked for his comments on this issue, noted that the return to the old clause would mean a setback for Indonesian democracy and would split national unity.²⁰ Another PDIP leader, Ahmad Basarah, noted that the proposal was racially discriminatory.

To be sure, the original 1945 Constitution was not a racially informed one, except for the clause on the president of Indonesia. It was a potent move therefore that the post-1998 Reform Movement chose to remove that one clause that had "racial" component from the Constitution. The calls to reverse the process does not bode well for Indonesian democracy.

¹⁸<http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2016/10/04/06472651/ppp.usul.amandemen.uud.1945.kembalikan.frasa.presiden.ialah.orang.indonesia.asli>. (Accessed 7 June 2017)

¹⁹ *Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945 (Dalam Persandingan Disertai Catatan)*. 2007. (Jakarta: Forum Konstitusi). P.5.

²⁰ <http://news.detik.com/berita/d-3314969/ketua-pdip-usulan-capres-wni-asli-usang-dan-anomali> (Accessed 7 June 2017). ed 7 June 2017)

CONCLUSION

It was B.J. Habibie, Suharto's successor and the third president of Indonesia, who abolished the distinction between pribumi and non-pribumi. The Indonesian Parliament had since then attempted to act in accordance with the non-racial nature of the 1945 Constitution.

Nevertheless, the concept of pribumi remains salient, especially whenever the income gap widens. Religion is also being used to mobilize the masses and some retired generals are indeed associating themselves with political Islam to gain political influence.

General Gatot's recent speeches on social inequality, his association with Islamic groups and his apparent ambition to become a politician, have encouraged pribumi-ism, which the Jokowi government wanted to play down. If this is unchecked, it may give rise to anti-Chinese riots and affect economic performance and political stability. Jokowi appears to have tolerated Gatot so as not to push the general into the opposition camp, especially when the general's actions suggest that he is preparing for a post-retirement political career.

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