

# Opinion

## JakartaGlobe

### Budi Delay a Step in The Right Direction

Observers and other concerned members of the public have closely followed the case of Comr. Gen. Budi Gunawan in the past week — the top police officer who was nominated by President Joko Widodo to become the chief of National Police but who just days afterward was named a suspect by the nation's highly respected Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK).

What seems to be bothering people most is the apparent pressure on Joko from senior members of his coalition to inaugurate Budi — more so than the general's financial track record. People have started to lose trust in the man who once promised to do things differently from his predecessors.

Budi was a close aide to current Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) chairwoman Megawati Soekarnoputri during her presidency (2001-2004), but appointing the chief of National Police is the prerogative of the nation's current president, and not its fifth.

Regardless of what — or who — was behind Budi's nomination, Joko's announcement on Friday to delay his appointment was a much-needed step in the right direction.

As we said earlier, Indonesia is at a crossroads and the president should place the interest of the people ahead of that of his political patrons. He has done so before by letting the KPK investigate would-be members of his cabinet and seems willing to do so again this time.

The announced delay gives the KPK time to prepare its case against Budi and may serve to buy time to find a graceful way out of the National Police succession debacle.

Joko stressed on Friday that the appointment was delayed and not canceled — but hopefully that, too, is just a matter of time.

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**Conservation** Erik Meijaard

## Indonesia's Contribution to the Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax

I guess few people know (or care) that Eskimoan language studies are in great turmoil. Angry and fur-clad scientists have warmed-up their frosty environment with fiery debate about the often-repeated cliché that Eskimo languages have a disproportionately large number of words to describe "snow."

The matter at hand is the so-called "Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax." Some have argued that the relatively large number of words in Eskimo for falling snow, snow on the ground, drifting snow, and others is evidence of the intimate relationship these northern people have with the white stuff. Others disagree, claiming that English itself has as many variations of snow-related words and that the whole issue is just a matter of weird grammar.

Wondering how this is relevant to Indonesia? Bear with me. No, I haven't unearthed a new study showing that Indonesia will soon be frozen over, and that Jakartans would be better off investing in snow shovels — just imagine what a good snow pack would do to the traffic here. Even former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said that there was little that Indonesia could do directly to save the polar bear. But who would have guessed that Indonesia has its own contributions to make to the great science of enviro-linguistics?

Here we have the urban-tropical equivalent of the same language enrichment due to people's relationship with particular environmental conditions. I mean the rich vocabulary Indonesians have developed for traffic jams — unusually but rather funnily translated by Google Translate as: crowded smoothly (*ramai lancar*), solid (*padat*), solid edging (*padat merayap*), severe misfire (*macet parah*), total standstill (*macet total*), and not moving (*tidak bergerak*).

There are undoubtedly more Indonesian words to express the severity of how stuck you are in traffic, but the key idea is that Indonesians have adapted their language to their changing environment, which reminds me of my current favorite Indonesian neologism, *tongsis*, short for *tongkat narsis* — the narcissistic Indonesian invention of the "selfie stick."

So what does a rich traffic jam vocabulary tell us about Indonesia's changing environment? Obviously Indonesians spend a lot of time in traffic jams, especially in cities. According to World Bank data, Indonesia increasingly urbanizes. Between 1980 and 2014, the level of Indonesian urbanization increased from 22 percent to 53 percent. At that rate, by 2040, three-quarters of all Indonesians will live a long distance from nature in urban, busy, relatively polluted environments.

How this will affect Indonesian environmental awareness remains unclear. Some worry that the global urbanization trend will result in more and more people who are entirely ignorant of the natural world around them. Hooked to their TVs and iPads, they have lost touch with the non-technological, non-urban reality.

Others, however, think that urbanization is good for nature. For a start, the more people you concentrate on a small piece of land, the less pressure there should be on the rest of the world and thus more space for nature. Several studies have shown that people in urban areas are actually more likely to support environmental and biodiversity conservation than rural ones. People in US cities, by and large, want wolves and bears to be protected. Yet people in small towns prefer



them dead, and why this stark difference exists isn't that clear. I guess city folks are less likely to be eaten by big carnivores or have their lambs and calves snacked on. And, perhaps, urbanites enjoy better education and greater welfare, giving them a chance to develop higher moral principles about the environment.

Such processes also seem to be at play in Europe. A recent study published in the journal *Science* showed that several species of large carnivore in Europe are doing remarkably well, considering how densely populated most of Europe is. Strong policies and strict law enforcement, along with the loss of agricultural land and its regeneration into more natural ecosystems have played a significant role. And it appears that people increasingly like having wildlife around them. It is now easy to see wild boars roaming through the suburbs of Berlin and Barcelona. And a Romanian government official in charge of the country's large carnivore population recently told me that, yes, every year a few people are killed by these animals, but that these death rates are nothing compared to the lethal impacts of vodka or cars (or a combination of the two). Romanians apparently consider the occasional death by wildlife as an acceptable societal cost.

On the other hand, people in Indonesia are far from accepting death or dam-

age from wildlife. A marauding elephant or tiger here is quickly caught or otherwise dispatched with. But that doesn't mean that things can't change.

With more and more Indonesians living in cities it is increasingly important to step up environmental education in school and media. More Indonesians need to understand why healthy environments are important for their own welfare and why they should demand policies that facilitate these.

Returning to the language debate, if the country's environmental conditions continue to worsen, future vocabularies may contain new words expressing the different shades of air or water pollution or severity of flooding (knee height, up to your chin, above the gable).

But maybe environmental awareness here will grow and subtle variations articulating the appreciation of nature will emerge. I would be very happy to find out that the future Indonesian language contained, for example, several words to describe the level of bird song in a forest.

And hopefully these will not just include the words for lonely whistle trees, empty forest, or silent shrub, but also comprise rich nuances for softly chattering bushes, raucous rural dawn chorus, recovering warble land, and intensely hooting woods.

Indonesian environmental awareness and morals have a long way to go. Think about that the next time you find yourself "solidly edging" in a Jakarta traffic jam. What can you do to make your fellow citizens, friends and family more aware of the urgent need to save Indonesia's sublime nature?

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