



COVID-19 IN ASIA

LAW AND POLICY CONTEXTS

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COVID-19 and Indonesia's response: too little, too late?

In October 2019, the Indonesian President, Joko Widodo (known as Jokowi) appointed his new cabinet for his second term after winning the April Presidential Election.¹ Programs to implement his campaign promises, as well as a plan to move the capital city from Jakarta to a new area in East Kalimantan, have been publicly announced. The atmosphere was good and there was sense of hope and positive feeling across the nation.² Little did he know that two months after that Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has been identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. The virus spread quickly to other parts of the world, resulting in an ongoing pandemic. On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), and subsequently, as a pandemic on 11 March 2020.³ This virus has ruined dramatically the Jokowi administration plan and program. This chapter seeks to evaluate Jokowi's government response and explain why they are not capable for responding quickly to the emergence of the COVID-19.

This chapter assesses that there are four main barriers: first, the unhealthy relationship between the Indonesian Medical Association (*Ikatan Dokter Indonesia* – IDI) and the recent appointed Ministry of Health Affairs. Second, the political rivalry between President Jokowi's administration and the current Governor of Jakarta, the national capital of Indonesia. Third, the incompetence of Jokowi cabinet, where lack of leadership shown during the crisis. And finally, the conservative religious groups' position to deny the suggestion not to organise mass prayer.

This chapter argues that the combination of four barriers above contributes to the slow response and ineffectiveness of the Government's policy and regulation during COVID-19 crisis. It's too little, too late. Jokowi administration has been pushed to the corner in making unclear policy, uncoordinated response and conflicting statements.

Overview of Jokowi Government's Response to COVID-19

¹ 'Indonesia election: Joko Widodo re-elected as president' BBC News, 21 May 2019 available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48331879> (accessed on 20 April 2020); on how ideology played an important role in voting behaviour during the election see Diego Fossati (2019) 'The Resurgence of Ideology in Indonesia: Political Islam, Aliran and Political Behaviour' 38(2) *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 119–148.

² 'Rupiah gains ground on appointment of professionals to Jokowi's Cabinet' *The Jakarta Post*, 22 October 2019 available at <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2019/10/22/rupiah-gains-ground-on-appointment-of-professionals-to-jokowis-cabinet.html> (accessed on 25 April 2020).

³ See the WHO official site to check on COVID-19 chronology: The World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen> (accessed on 13 May 2020)

The government had been in denial. That was the initial response from the Jokowi administration, despite its neighbours reporting numerous confirmed cases of COVID-19. The first case relating to the COVID-19 pandemic in Singapore was confirmed on 23 January.⁴ Malaysia confirmed the first case on 25 January.⁵ However, until early March, the Indonesian government claimed it had no cases of infection COVID-19 in Indonesia. The first confirmed of COVID-19 to have spread to Indonesia is on 2 March 2020, when a dance instructor and her mother were infected from a Japanese national.⁶ By 9 April, the pandemic had spread to all 34 provinces in the country after Gorontalo confirmed its first case, with Jakarta, East Java, and West Java being the worst-hit.

So, what did happen between late January and early March? Why there is no case of COVID-19 in Indonesia during those periods? In February, Indonesia's health minister attributes the country's lack of coronavirus cases to prayer.⁷ A study by Harvard University public health researchers in the first week of February found Indonesia should have reported a coronavirus outbreak and could have undetected cases,⁸ given its extensive air links to China and the city of Wuhan, the epicentre of the outbreak. The Health Minister dismissed such study as "insulting".⁹

In February, unlike its neighbours that were imposing tough travel restrictions, President Jokowi instead offered discounts of up to 30% to attract tourists visiting Indonesia. Between January and March, flights from countries with high infection rate, including China, South Korea and Thailand, continued to operate. His government was also reported to allocate million dollars to pay social media influencers for tourism promotions.¹⁰ It seems that his administration approaches this COVID-19 as an opportunity to boost trade, investment and

⁴ See Chapter on Singapore in this edited volume.

⁵ See Chapter on Malaysia in this edited volume.

⁶ Alan Weedon, 'Coronavirus COVID-19 has now reached Indonesia, President Joko Widodo confirms', *ABC News*, 2 March 2020 available at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-02/indonesia-records-first-cases-of-covid-19-coronavirus/12018090> (accessed on 1 May 2020)

⁷ Joe Cochrane, 'We owe it to God': as Indonesia prays, how is it keeping the coronavirus at bay? *South China Morning Post*, 18 February 2020 available at <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3051068/we-owe-it-god-indonesia-prays-how-it-keeping> (accessed on 1 May 2020)

⁸ Pablo M De Salazar, Rene Niehus, Aimee Taylor, Caroline O Buckee, Marc Lipsitch (2020) 'Using predicted imports of 2019-nCoV cases to determine locations that may not be identifying all imported cases' *medRxiv* 2020.02.04.20020495; doi: <https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.02.04.20020495> (accessed on 20 April 2020).

Gemma Holliani Cahy, 'It's meant to help': Harvard professor responds after government dismisses study on undetected coronavirus cases' *The Jakarta Post*, 15 February 2020 available at <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/02/14/its-meant-to-help-harvard-professor-responds-after-government-dismisses-study-on-undetected-coronavirus-cases.html> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

⁹ <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/02/12/its-insulting-indonesia-criticizes-us-study-concerns-over-no-coronavirus-cases.html> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

¹⁰ Tim Lindsey and Tim Mann, 'Indonesia was in denial over coronavirus. Now it may be facing a looming disaster' *The Conversation*, 9 April 2020 available at <https://theconversation.com/indonesia-was-in-denial-over-coronavirus-now-it-may-be-facing-a-looming-disaster-135436> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

tourism. By declaring Indonesia as a safe place from COVID-19, his administration hoped that people would come to Indonesia to invest and visit. It looks smart, but a dangerous game at the end.

The main problem with this kind of approach is that he could not foresee this COVID-19 is not a regional issue, but a pandemic that changes the face of the world we live in. The failure to see what is coming makes his government response is very slow in dealing with the matters. In fact, the public get the impression that this COVID-19 is a small matter that the Health Minister said the coronavirus is a self-limited disease so that the patient can heal themselves by increasing their immunity.¹¹ Even after the first case was confirmed later on in Indonesia, various comments from his administration were still trying to downplay the seriousness of COVID-19. Take example when the home affairs minister urged the public to eat more bean sprouts and broccoli,¹² along with Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment who was still arguing the virus cannot survive in tropical climates,¹³ while President Jokowi sang the praises of jamu, traditional herbal remedies, to boost the immune system against COVID-19.¹⁴ These comments reveal the government's approaching COVID-19 as individual issues; not as a State matter that require a careful plan and a State institutional response.

On 2 March 2020, Indonesia finally declared COVID-19 had reached the archipelago.¹⁵ So, the response and action of Indonesia was 2 months late from his neighbours. Jokowi admitted that he was deliberately holding back some information on COVID-19 cases to prevent the public from panicking. The media reported the President's statement that:

"Indeed, we did not deliver certain information to the public because we did not want to stir panic. We have worked hard to overcome this, since the novel coronavirus outbreak can happen regardless of the country border," Jokowi said on Friday.

He assured the public that his administration had tried its best to overcome the pandemic through several measures. He also told the public to remain calm and vigilant.¹⁶

¹¹ Office of Assistant to Deputy Cabinet Secretary for State Documents & Translation, 'Health Minister on Coronavirus Test: We Will Inform As It Is' 2 March 2020, available at <https://setkab.go.id/en/health-minister-on-coronavirus-test-we-will-inform-as-it-is/> (accessed on 5 May 2020)

¹² 'Tito Sarankan Warga Banyak Makan Taoge untuk Tangkal Corona' *CNN Indonesia*, 17 March 2020 available at <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20200317152546-20-484236/tito-sarankan-warga-banyak-makan-taoge-untuk-tangkal-corona> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

¹³ Tim Detikcom, 'Saat Luhut Bicara Corona Tak Tahan Cuaca Panas Indonesia' *Detik*, 3 April 2020 available at <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4963524/saat-luhut-bicara-corona-tak-tahan-cuaca-panas-indonesia> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

¹⁴ 'Indonesia President Joko stokes speculation herbs can fight coronavirus' *The Strait Times*, 13 March 2020 available at <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-president-joko-stokes-speculation-herbs-can-fight-coronavirus> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

¹⁵ Joshua Nevett, 'Coronavirus: I watched the president reveal I had Covid-19 on TV' *BBC*, 6 May 2020 available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-52501443> (accessed on 14 May 2020)

¹⁶ Dyaning Pangestika, 'We don't want people to panic': Jokowi says on lack of transparency about COVID cases' *The Jakarta Post*, 13 March 2020

After the first case confirmed, the government took nearly a month to finally began to act by banning mass gatherings through the so-called “large-scale social restrictions”. It also announced it releases 30,000 prisoners from the country’s overcrowded and unhealthy prisons. Jokowi administration also issued a government regulation in lieu of law (*Peraturan Pemerintah Pengganti Undang-Undang*, known as Perppu) that boost state spending by up to Rp 405.1 trillion (US\$24.6 billion) as the budget deficit is anticipated to widen to 5.07 percent of GDP in the nation’s fight against COVID-19. Under the emergency power stipulated in Article 22 of the 1945 Constitution, the government may issue a Perppu. But a Perppu needs to be approved by the parliament during its next session.¹⁷

Accordingly, the Perppu would serve as a foundation for the government and banking and financial authorities to carry out extraordinary measures to ensure the people’s health, safeguard the national economy and financial system stability. The program and budget set up in October 2019, when Jokowi appointed his cabinet, clearly had to be adjusted. Regulation in Lieu of Law (Perppu)¹⁸ allows the government to extend the state budget deficit beyond the normal 3-percent-of-GDP limit and allocate extra spending to the COVID-19 response, while protecting officials from any legal charges as long as they act in good faith and according to the law.¹⁹

Of the extra spending, the government will allocate Rp 75 trillion for healthcare spending, Rp 110 trillion for social protection and Rp 70.1 trillion for tax incentives and credit for enterprises. The biggest chunk, Rp 150 trillion, will be set aside for economic recovery programs including credit restructuring and financing for small and medium businesses.²⁰ On 12 May 2020, the Parliament approved the Perppu and passed it as a Law (at the time of the writing, there is no data available about the law number as it has just been passed by the parliament).

An application was immediately lodged to the Constitutional Court to challenge the validity of Perppu No 1 of 2020, led by Amien Rais, the former Speaker of The People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat - MPR).²¹ However, since Perppu has been approved by the Parliament and become an Act, the applicants must lodge a new application to the Constitutional Court as the object of this judicial review has been changed: from Perppu to a Law. The earlier application was based on the ground, among others, that Perppu is against the Constitution by granting immunity for the officials from any legal charges in

<https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/03/13/we-dont-want-people-to-panic-jokowi-says-on-lack-of-transparency-about-covid-cases.html> (accessed on 8 May 2020)

¹⁷ Article 22 of the 1945 Constitution

¹⁸ Perppu No 1 of 2020

¹⁹ Ghina Ghaliya, ‘House passes Perppu on COVID-19 response amid concerns of embezzlement’ *The Jakarta Post*, 12 May 2020 available at <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/05/12/house-passes-perppu-on-covid-19-response-amid-concerns-of-embezzlement.html> (accessed on 14 May 2020)

²⁰ Perppu No 1 of 2020

²¹ ‘Yulida Medistiara, ‘Sidang Perdana Perppu Corona, MK Minta Gugatan Amien Rais-MAKI Diperbaiki’, *Detik*, 28 April 2020 available at <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4995019/sidang-perdana-perppu-corona-mk-minta-gugatan-amien-rais-maki-diperbaiki> (accessed on 14 May 2020)

executing the government's plan during COVID-19 pandemic.²² Accordingly, it would be very unlikely that the Court would declare the invalidity of the Act dealing with COVID-19. But If the Court agreed with the applicants, it would certainly bring a huge damage to the Government's effort during this emergency situation.

As of 15 May, Indonesia has recorded 16,496 cases, the second-highest in Southeast Asia, behind Singapore.²³ In terms of death numbers, Indonesia ranks fifth in Asia with 1,076 deaths.²⁴ However, the number of deaths may be much higher than what has been reported as those who died with acute coronavirus symptoms but had not been confirmed or tested were not counted in the official death figure.²⁵ Jokowi declared a public health emergency on 31 March 2020 and opted for large-scale social restrictions (PSBB) over a territorial quarantine as his preferred method of containing COVID-19. This is the basis of his legal and political response to this pandemic.

Unhealthy Relationship: A New Minister and Medical Association

As has been mentioned above, throughout January and February, Health Minister Terawan Agus Putranto repeatedly denied Indonesia had any cases of coronavirus - despite mounting evidence to the contrary - because of the 'power of prayer', while President Joko Widodo has admitted to withholding information from the public to avoid panic. The situation gets worse owing to the unhealthy relationship between the Minister and the Indonesian Medical Association (IDI) that undermines the policy of Jokowi administration in dealing with COVID-19 in efficient and effective ways.

Putranto was appointed as the Health Minister in October 2019. The President put two main reasons that, first, as a medical doctor and retired three stars general, he is considered a capable person in hospital management owing to his recent post as the Director of RSPAD (Central Hospital of the Indonesian Army), one of the largest Indonesian public hospitals. Second, he has a good track record at the international level as Chair of the International Committee on Military Medicine (ICMM).²⁶ However his appointment as the minister has been criticised by the IDI.

²² Rahmi Nurfaejriani, 'https://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/nasional/pr-01383149/perppu-nomor-1-tahun-2020-disahkan-guru-besar-unpad-imunitas-sempurna-untuk-pejabat-berwenang', *Pikiran Rakyat*, 15 May 2020 <https://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/nasional/pr-01383149/perppu-nomor-1-tahun-2020-disahkan-guru-besar-unpad-imunitas-sempurna-untuk-pejabat-berwenang> (accessed on 15 May 2020)

²³ See 'Coronavirus Update Worldwide', *Worldometers*, available at <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries> (accessed on 15 May 2020)

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Tom Allard, Kate Lamb 'Exclusive: More than 2,200 Indonesians have died with coronavirus symptoms, data shows', *Reuters*, 28 April 2020 available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-indonesia-casualty/exclusive-more-than-2200-indonesians-have-died-with-coronavirus-symptoms-data-shows-idUSKCN22A04N> (accessed on 13 May 2020)

²⁶ Kementerian Sekretariat Negara, 'Presiden Blak-blakan Soal Alasannya Memilih dr. Terawan, Tito Karnavian hingga Yasonna Jadi Menteri' available at

Commented [a1]: Considering undetected or under-detected Covid cases in some countries including Indonesia, on 15 March 2020, WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus sent an official letter followed by a direct phone call to Jokowi requesting for scaling-up the emergency response including national emergency declaration (<https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/03/14/covid-19-who-urges-jokowi-to-declare-national-emergency.html>)

In short, long before his appointment, on 12 February 2018, the IDI issued a disciplinary sentence to Putranto. As a member of the IDI, Putranto was found guilty of the code of ethics by this a highly respected medical association. The IDI suspended Putranto for 2 years and terminated his medical practice permit. They found that he had violated the IDI's code of ethics by adopting and promoting a method of brain therapy that had not yet been clinically proven safe and effective in curing patients. It was a result of a long investigation as his ethical violation hearing began in 2015. Therefore, when he was appointed as the Health Minister, he is still under the IDI sanction.

However, Putranto was backed up publicly by many top people (former Chief Justice, former first lady, a former Chair of Political Party, and a presidential candidate).²⁷ Despite the controversy of his brain-cleaning therapy, many provide testimonies that Putranto save them from stroke though his treatment of the 'intra-arterial cerebral flushing'.²⁸ For medical professionals, any newly discovered medical therapy must have empirical evidence to be safe and/or effective for use, to prevent patients being exposed to risk as much as possible. According to the IDI, Putranto therapy failed to meet this expectation, despite many patients confirmed the success of such treatments. But Putranto keeps going with his treatment and publishes his findings at academic journal.²⁹ When the IDI heard information that Jokowi was considering Putranto as one of the candidates for the Minister position, the IDI sent letter to the President to urge the President to reject Putranto as the candidate on 30 September 2020.³⁰ Ignoring the IDI's letter, the President firmly appointed Putranto.

When COVID-19 hit Indonesia, the unhealthy relationship of the Health Minister and the Doctors has a bad influence on the way government's response to the crisis. Like in other countries, Doctors and nurses are the frontlines in dealing with this pandemic. Due to the 'weird' relationship, the Ministry of Health had not made the program to deal with the pandemic. *Tempo* magazine reported how Jokowi and his advisors were preparing their own plan as they did not receive the program or planning from the Ministry of Health.³¹ At a

<https://www.setneg.go.id/baca/index/presiden-blak-blakan-soal-alasannya-memilih-dr-terawan-tito-karnavian-hingga-yasonna-jadi-menteri> 24 October 2019 (accessed on 28 April 2020)

²⁷ 'Dokter Terawan dan Jejak-jejak Kontroversi Cuci Otak' *CNN Indonesia*, 24 October 2019 <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/gaya-hidup/20191024112312-255-442474/dokter-terawan-dan-jejak-jejak-kontroversi-cuci-otak> (accessed on 28 April 2020)

²⁸ Dyna Rochmyaningsih, 'Indonesian health minister under fire for pushing his own controversial stroke treatment', *Science*, 10 January 2020, available at <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/01/indonesian-health-minister-under-fire-pushing-his-own-controversial-stroke-treatment#> (accessed on 16 May 2020)

²⁹ Terawan Agus Putranto, Irawan Yusuf, Bachtiar Murtala, Andi Wijaya (2016) 'Intra Arterial Heparin Flushing Increases Cerebral Blood Flow in Chronic Ischemic Stroke Patients' 8(2) *The Indonesian Biomedical Journal*, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18585/inabj.v8i2.204>

³⁰ Eviera Paramita Sandi, 'IDI Tak Setujui Pengangkatan Menkes Hingga Tulis Surat Ke Jokowi, Ini Reaksi Dokter Terawan', *Tribun News*, 24 October 2019 available at <https://bali.tribunnews.com/2019/10/24/idi-tak-setuju-dirinya-jadi-menkes-hingga-tulis-surat-ke-jokowi-ini-reaksi-dokter-terawan> (accessed on 16 May 2020)

³¹ Raymundus Rikang, 'Lobi Corona di Jenewa' *Tempo Magazine*, 7 April 2020 edition, available at <https://majalah.tempo.co/read/laporan-utama/159896/gusar-istana-terhadap-terawan-soal-corona> (accessed on 16 May 2020)

Commented [a2]: Washing

Commented [a3]: Evidence-based medicine including scientific not just empirical-based evidence

practical level, Putranto uses his position as a retired military general to ask help from army doctors,³² and keeps the distance from the IDI. Doctors have pleaded with the Ministry to urgently provide them with more protective equipment amid a terrifying shortage on the front line of the coronavirus pandemic.

A hospital crisis looms as reports indicate that the combined capacity of the 132 referral hospitals designated to treat COVID-19 patients is far from adequate.³³ While the system is inadequate, the government still maintains a lack of transparency over releasing information about patients and its preparedness. This often leaves medical workers in the dark about whether they are treating a COVID-19 patient and it puts their lives at risk. The Minister was also criticized for his coordination of hospitals to address the outbreak as he had failed to ensure the availability of finances and equipment for them. He was also criticized for failing to maintain the quality of health workers, administrative staff and data centers in hospitals.³⁴ It is also alleged that the Minister monopolises coronavirus swab tests in the ministry's Health Research and Development Agency (*Balitbangkes*) in Jakarta. This arguably had slowed down health authorities' response to the COVID-19 emergency, as samples from provinces must be sent to Jakarta.³⁵

However, Jokowi maintain Putranto in his position. Instead, Jokowi only asked Putranto not to talk in public about COVID19. Subsequently, the government appointed a spokesperson to represent the government with a task to update data of COVID-19 to the public and media.³⁶

The clash between the Ministry and the IDI erupts when they differ about the data. Indonesia's death toll from the coronavirus has likely reached 1,000, nearly double the official figure of 582, the Chairman of the IDI Daeng Faqih was quoted by the media in April. There is a discrepancy between official figures and the IDI's estimate, as official data does not include the deaths of patients suspected to have the coronavirus but are still awaiting tests.³⁷ The public left unsure which data is more reliable: the Ministry or the IDI? This is one of the results

Commented [a4]: Lack of firm health crisis protocol referring to the previous SARS and MERS crisis in 2010

Commented [a5]: And lack of coordination with remote/regional health agency (Dinas kesehatan propinsi)

Commented [a6]: Monopolises or centralizes?

³² 'Panglima TNI: 988 Prajurit Tenaga Medis Tersebar di 109 RS Tangani Wabah Corona' *Liputan 6*, 15 April 2020 available at <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/4228645/panglima-tni-988-prajurit-tenaga-medis-tersebar-di-109-rs-tangani-wabah-corona> (accessed on 16 May 2020)

³³ 'COVID-19: Inadequate medical supplies take toll on lives of Indonesian medical workers' *The Jakarta Post*, 22 March 2020 available at <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/03/22/covid-19-inadequate-medical-supplies-take-toll-on-lives-of-indonesian-medical-workers.html> (accessed on 10 May 2020)

³⁴ 'Terawan must go, civil groups say, demanding crisis-sensitive health minister' *The Jakarta Post*, 17 March 2020 available at <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/03/17/terawan-must-go-civil-groups-say-demanding-crisis-sensitive-health-minister.html> (accessed on 15 May 2020)

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ 'Govt appoints Achmad Yurianto as spokesperson for COVID-19-related matters in Indonesia' *The Jakarta Post*, 4 March 2020 available at <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/03/04/govt-appoints-achmad-yurianto-as-spokesperson-for-covid-19-related-matters-in-indonesia.html> (accessed on 13 May 2020)

³⁷ 'Indonesia's death toll may be double official figure: Doctors' association', *The Strait Times*, 20 April 2020 available at <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesias-death-toll-may-be-double-official-figure-doctors-association> (accessed on 13 May 2020)

of the unhealthy relationship between these two institutions. Instead of cooperating and collaborating, as they continue their fighting to the next level during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Rivalry of National Government and Capital City

In US, the media has reported a clash between President Trump and the New York Governor Cuomo,³⁸ while Indonesia has an ongoing clash between President Jokowi administration and the Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan. The conflict started when Jokowi dismissed Baswedan from his position as Minister of Education and Culture in July 2016, less than two years of serving in the role. From a close aide to a bitter opponent, Baswedan competed in the 2017 Jakarta Governatorial Election, against Basuki Tjahaya Purnama (known as Ahok), a politician who served as Deputy Governor under Governor Jokowi, and subsequently became the Governor when Jokowi was appointed as the President.³⁹

To make the story short of a bitter campaign led to Blasphemy trial of Ahok, Baswedan was selected as the new governor. A year later, his deputy governor, Sandiaga Uno decided to vacate his position and run as Vice Presidential candidate, with Prabowo as the Presidential candidate, against Jokowi who ran for his second term. Jokowi won the election, but the rivalry between his camp and Baswedan's camp continues. Baswedan is seen as the potential candidate for 2024 Election. While constitutionally speaking Jokowi could not run for the third time, his camp and supporters hope that they will continue running the government beyond 2024, and Baswedan is considered as the one who could stop them.

Against this background, when the coronavirus hit Indonesia, including its national capital, Jakarta, there is a silent competition between the two administration. It is well known that during the crisis, a new leader would emerge to win the people's heart. Therefore, the response of Jokowi administration to COVID-19 has been heavily influenced in their calculation of Baswedan's manoeuvre. This creates some confusion and lack of coordination between National government and provincial response.

To one of the Australian media, Baswedan makes a claim he began monitoring and tracking potential cases of coronavirus in January in his city. If his claim was right, it means more than a month before Indonesia belatedly reported its first case of infection on 2 March 2020. He set up a hotline number for the 190 hospitals in Jakarta to report suspect cases. He was reported to say:

³⁸ Rebecca Shabad, 'Trump and Gov. Cuomo clash over coronavirus response after president tells him to stop 'complaining'', *NBC News*, 18 April 2020 available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/cuomo-trump-clash-over-coronavirus-response-after-president-says-stop-n1186396> (accessed on 13 May 2020)

³⁹ On 2017 election see Nithin Coca, 'The Fall of Ahok and Indonesia's Future' *The Diplomat*, 21 April 2017 available at <https://thediplomat.com/2017/04/the-fall-of-ahok-and-indonesias-future/> (accessed on 12 May 2020); and on 2012 Election see Nadirsyah Hosen, 'Race and Religion in the 2012 Jakarta Governatorial Election: The Case of Jokowi-Ahok' in T. Lindsey, & H. Pausacker (Eds.), *Religion, Law and Intolerance in Indonesia* (London, Routledge, 2016), 180-194.

"And then when the numbers started to go up continuously, at that time we were not allowed to do testing. So whenever we have cases, we send the samples to the [national government-controlled] national lab. And then the national lab will inform, positive or negative. By the end of February, we were wondering why it is all negative?"

"At that time I decided to go public and I said we have been monitoring, these are the numbers. Immediately it was sort of responded to by the Ministry [of Health] who said we have no positive cases."⁴⁰

What Baswedan is trying to say is that a denial from the Health Minister, as has been discussed earlier, contributed to slow response of the national government that has impacted at so many levels, including Baswedan's administration in the capital city. The governor also expressed frustration with the national government - and in particular with the Ministry of Health - for a lack of transparency. The national government approach is not to provide the actual data owing to trigger public's fear and panic. But for Baswedan, being transparent to the people about how many people are infected would provide a sense of security.

Another report claimed that Jokowi government has systematically eroded Baswedan's program to manage the crisis. As a capital city, Jakarta is seen as the nation's coronavirus epicenter, however the governor's requests to impose social distancing measures were repeatedly rejected by the national government.⁴¹ It seems that the Jokowi government did not want the public to see this request as an initiative of Baswedan to handle the crisis properly. Only after it is seen as the national government moved first by declaring of a nationwide health emergency, then his request was approved after being held up further by the health minister.⁴²

However, not all Baswedan's program was executed properly by his own administration. For instance, a restriction on the operational hours of public transportation imposed by Baswedan in Jakarta to contain the spread of COVID-19 went to a chaotic situation. Large crowds and long lines building up at Transjakarta and MRT Jakarta stations across the capital on a busiest day and time, Monday 16 March 2020, during peak hours. His attempt to have social distancing create a negative result against its own purpose. MRT Jakarta reduced the number of cars for each train to four from the usual 16, bringing down the maximum capacity from 300 people to 60. Transjakarta management announced the restriction on Sunday, a day earlier, saying it would only operate 13 routes from March 16 to 30. During the same period, the company will also suspend its evening services (AMARI).

⁴⁰ James Massola, "Not allowed to do testing": governor says Jakarta was tracking COVID-19 cases in January' The Sydney Morning Herald, 7 May 2020 <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/not-allowed-to-do-testing-governor-says-jakarta-was-tracking-covid-19-cases-in-january-20200507-p54qnh.html> (accessed on 13 May 2020)

⁴¹ Sana Jaffrey, 'Coronavirus Blunders in Indonesia Turn Crisis Into Catastrophe', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 29 April 2020 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/29/coronavirus-blunders-in-indonesia-turn-crisis-into-catastrophe-pub-81684> (accessed on 10 May 2020)

⁴² Ibid.

The chaos owing to lack of coordination for WFH (work From Home) program. If WFH program works, then reducing a number of public transports would make sense, in order to discourage people going outside their homes. But, during that time, not many companies had imposed WFH. At the same time, a large number of people who are having informal workforce and still work in public spaces and on the street continued using public transport. Restricting the operation of public transport would only make commuters squeezing into packed buses and stations. The coronavirus could easily spread amongst them in that situation.

The national government through the Acting Minister of Transport also cancelled Governor Baswedan's regulation in preventing inter-city bus from other provinces to Jakarta. This is to prevent the spreading of COVID-19 from Jakarta to other cities, or vice versa. But the Minister cancelled it as the national government wanted to calculate the economic impact of such regulation. This is another evidence of how the political rivalry between national government and Jakarta create confusion amongst people, and at the same time, demonstrate lack of coordination.

Uncoordinated Response and Lack of Leadership

The administrative and political structure of Indonesia makes coordinating the response to COVID-19 challenging. It would be misleading to assume that COVID-19 is only a health issue that should be dealt by the Ministry of Health. In fact, it intersects with other important ministries such as tourism, finance, law, education and so on. It is worth noting that with population over 240 millions, a response to COVID-19 must also be coordinated over 34 provinces with markedly different geographic conditions and varying health systems capacity. In this sense, a leadership does matter. Sadly, that is missing during COVID-19 responses in Indonesia.

While the central government is on a clash with Jakarta administration, as has been discussed earlier, that make them busy in calculating political rivalry, Jokowi is also surrounded by people who issue different and conflicting statements and even regulations to the already confused public. The impression that the public get is that there is lack of coordination amongst the key government officers.

Take example, the way of the government communicates to the public about its decision to ban or not to ban the mudik (annual tradition of returning to the village after completing fasting in the holy month of Ramadan and to celebrate the day of the Idul Fitri). This tradition would involve approximately 20 million people. The potential of spreading the virus is real, from using crowded public transportation, meeting and visiting with families and friends in the villages, includes shaking hands as a gesture to forgive each other mistakes, and of course dining together. So, how the government should deal with this?

After a Cabinet meeting on 2 April 2020, presidential spokesperson Fadjoel Rachman released a statement insisting there would be no official ban on the *mudik*. However, travellers should self-isolate for the recommended two-week period and would in the meantime be placed under general observation (ODP) when they arrive in their hometowns.

He also said that Muslim leaders should encourage their people not to go for Mudik, despite no official travel ban of the *mudik* from the government.⁴³

Rachman's statement was confusing. For instance, the public holiday where travellers go for *mudik* is around 1 week, they can extend it by another week if they are not government officers who should go back to work after *mudik*. Therefore, when the government ask the *mudik* travellers to self-isolate for 2 weeks after arriving in their home village, people not only reply saying that what's the purpose of 2 weeks Mudik if they should self-isolate during these periods, but also saying that they are in doubt that local authorities in their village would provide facilities and treatment to make the self-isolation actually happens.

Later that day, State Secretary Pratikno sought to clarify Rachman's statement, saying the President had actually called on the people not to go back to their hometowns, although he did not categorically state that the President would ban the *mudik* this year. But the President again stopped short of issuing stricter orders to prevent people from mobilizing, calling instead for greater community oversight at the village level to observe recent arrivals from Greater Jakarta.⁴⁴ The President himself said he was open to adjusting the dates of the Idul Fitri public holiday in consideration of people who will not be able to return to their hometowns for the annual mudik.⁴⁵

After Pratikno waded into the conversation, Fadjoel revised his statement to advise people not to return to their hometowns and added a point about social assistance for informal workers, many of whom have lost their source of income as economic activities slowed in the capital. So, the approach taken is to provide money to those who do not mudik, so they can survive during staying at home.

It is worth considering that not only the government officer issue confusing and conflicting statements, but the root of the problem is the unclear position of the President himself: to ban or not to ban mudik. He was afraid to make a decisive statement and instead, wants to make a compromised policy. Local authorities at provincial and municipality also got confused to understand the central government actual position on this matter. Regional hospitals are not as equipped to handle an outbreak as those in the capital region, which is Indonesia's virus epicentre, should the travellers from Jakarta go for mudik to the villages and spread the virus.⁴⁶

⁴³ Marchio Irfan Gorbiano, 'COVID-19: Jokowi allows 'mudik', asks community units to monitor potential virus carriers' *The Jakarta Post* 2 April 2020 <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/04/02/covid-19-jokowi-allows-mudik-asks-community-units-to-monitor-potential-virus-carriers.html> (accessed on 10 May 2020)

⁴⁴ Marchio Irfan Gorbiano, 'Be more coherent with COVID-19 announcements, analysts tell Jokowi' *The Jakarta Post*, 10 April 2020 <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/04/10/be-more-coherent-with-covid-19-announcements-analysts-tell-jokowi.html> (accessed on 10 May 2020)

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Belinda Spagnoletti, 'Indonesia's lockdown dilemma: mudik is a safety net for some, but may worsen the Covid-19 public health disaster' *Indonesia at Melbourne*, 6 April 2020 available at <https://indonesiatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/indonesias-lockdown-dilemma-mudik-is-a-safety-net-for-some-but-may-worsen-the-covid-19-public-health-disaster/> (accessed on 10 May 2020)

It took 3 weeks for Jokowi to clarify his position. On 24 April 2020, the central government officially ban mudik.⁴⁷ The gap is seen as too late as many travellers already went for mudik owing to the fear that the Government would ban it later. It means that the many mudik travellers already back to their villages and create huge problems for local authorities. For instance, almost 900 buses carrying more than 14,000 passengers arrived in Wonogiri, Central Java, from the Greater Jakarta area.⁴⁸ Similar numbers have made the journey to regional areas of West Java.⁴⁹

The central government set up a Coronavirus Disease Response Acceleration Task Force (*Gugus Tugas Percepatan Penanganan Penyakit Virus Corona 2019*) led by three stars general Doni Monardo, in his capacity as Head of The National Agency for Disaster Countermeasure (*Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana - BNPB*). This Head of BNPB position is equal to a minister-level official, allowing the agency to directly take over commanding functions during natural disasters. However, in our view, this position is not enough to handle the COVID-19 problems.

First, it is seen by the public that Head of BNPB is only doing a practical job, and not for making a policy. Second, given the huge challenge across ministerial portfolios –from health, tourism, finance to education as well as religion— and also to direct and collaborate with all governors in 34 provinces, it is argued that the Head of the Task Force should be a more senior minister like a Coordinating Minister for Human Development and Cultural Affairs Muhadjir Effendy. But, instead, Effendy is placed as Head of Advisory Board of the Task Force –the position that has no significant impact. Third, while probably Jokowi trust Monardo to have more personal capabilities rather than Effendy, but as a military general, Monardo is not trained to have good communication skill when talking to the public about what the Task Force is doing. His tone and voice look like giving an order to his soldiers. It does not sound right for civilians.

Lack of coordination, conflicting statement, and not appointing the right person make public not seeing a strong leadership from Jokowi administration in dealing with the huge challenges of COVID-19.

Religion and COVID-19: the biggest dilemma⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Arys Aditya and Harry Suhartono, 'Indonesia Bans Annual Holiday Exodus to Combat Virus Spread', *Bloomberg*, 21 April 2020 available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-21/indonesia-bans-mass-travel-ahead-of-eid-festival-to-combat-virus> (accessed on 10 May 2020)

⁴⁸ 'Di Tengah Wabah Corona, Ribuan Perantau Wonogiri di Jabodetabek Pulang Kampung', *Kumparan*, 25 Maret 2020 available at <https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/di-tengah-wabah-corona-ribuan-perantau-wonogiri-di-jabodetabek-pulang-kampung-1t5rkyZ2dVk> (accessed on 11 May 2020)

⁴⁹ Ahmad Fikri, 'ODP Corona Jawa Barat Melonjak, Kepala Dinkes: Sebagian Pemudik' *Tempo*, 31 March 2020 available at <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1326285/odp-corona-jawa-barat-melonjak-kepala-dinkes-sebagian-pemudik> (accessed on 12 May 2020)

⁵⁰ This section is based on Nadirsyah Hosen, 'When religion meets Covid-19 in Indonesia: more than a matter of conservatives and moderates' *Indonesia at Melbourne*, 29 April 2020 available at <https://indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/when-religion-meets-covid-19-in-indonesia-more-than-a-matter-of-conservatives-and-moderates/> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented believers with a dilemma: either they choose to “lockdown” their prayers at home, or they view the pandemic as a challenge of their faith and, in response, refuse to maintain a “social distance” from God and the public rituals that are part of their beliefs. Such situation also apply to Indonesia as a home to more than two hundred million believers, from six official religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. It is no surprise that these religions have responded in different and complex ways to the Covid-19 crisis.

Take, for example, what happened on 18 March, 2020, in Gowa, South Sulawesi. Thousands of Muslim pilgrims from across Asia gathered for the five-day event *Ijtima* (Islamic congregation), despite the fact that the Indonesian government had asked the organising body, the *Tablighi Jama'at*, a global movement of evangelical Muslims which promotes proselytising (*dakwah*), to cancel the event, owing to the fears that such a large meeting could fuel the spread of the coronavirus. The next day, 19 March, 2020, thousands also gathered on the Indonesian island of Flores, at an ordination ceremony for a Catholic bishop, despite calls from authorities to avoid mass gatherings. These were two very busy days for the authorities. Those believers in two different location ignores the call to cancel the events from Doni Monardo, Head of Gugus Tugas.

As a result, now Indonesia knows what they called as Gowa cluster. Hundreds of confirmed COVID-19 cases are those attended Gowa *ijtima*. For example, The Central Java administration has formed a team to track down approximately 1,500 Central Java residents who attended a mass religious gathering in Gowa, South Sulawesi, following the emergence of a COVID-19 cluster in Brebes regency. The media reported that 16 residents of Brebes who had, in March, attended *ijtima* in Gowa regency, tested positive for COVID-19.⁵¹ The damage has been done.

Those who believe that ritual is intended primarily to serve God will put public worship ahead of concerns over Covid-19. They challenge other believers with difficult questions: “Why you are afraid of the virus? You should be afraid of God.” They oppose government regulations forbidding them to organise mass prayers in holy places, such as mosques, churches or temples. Those who take the second position believe God does not need our prayers –we are the ones who need God. There is room for interpretation and relaxation of some ritual requirements because worship is not solely for the benefit of God, but for us. These differences have led religious communities to respond in a variety of ways to the Covid-19 crisis.

The *Salafi* group in Indonesia, following the decision of the Saudi Arabian authorities to close two Holy Mosques, agreed to worship at home. Even the FPI (*Front Pembela Islam* - Islamic Defender’s Front), notoriously famous for their militancy in demanding strict adherence to *Shari'a* requirements, had discouraged public gatherings long before the PSBB (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* - Large Scale Social Restrictions) were enacted in big cities in Indonesia, including in the capital city of Jakarta, on 23 April, 2020.

⁵¹ ‘COVID-19: Central Java tracking down 1,500 residents who attended Gowa gathering’ *The Jakarta Post*, 8 May 2020 available at <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/05/07/covid-19-central-java-tracking-down-1500-residents-who-attended-gowa-gathering.html> (accessed on 15 May 2020)

The three most prominent Islamic organisations in Indonesia, the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, have now all issued religious rulings (or *fatwa*) ordering followers to avoid mass gatherings at mosques.⁵² But many mosques in Aceh, West Sumatra, West Nusa Tenggara, West Java and East Java are still holding regular Friday prayers, as well as *tarawih* prayers (additional prayers performed at night during Ramadan).

Crucially, some of the religious leaders (*kiai* and *ustadz*) arguing for the right to organise and lead mass prayers belong to Nahdlatul Ulama, which is usually considered progressive in its stand against radicalism. These religious leaders argue that they have already applied government protocols at the mosques, by providing hand sanitiser and disinfectant, cleaning the walls and carpets, and asking people to stand at more than one metre apart during prayer.

Is this enough? The government says no, because of the possibility of asymptomatic people transmitting the virus without realising in enclosed places where people gather. The crucial point is that rituals and traditions involving mass gatherings are almost inseparable from Ramadan. From *tarawih*, to *tadarus* (readings of the Qur'an), *i'tikaf* (a period of remaining in the mosque), *pengajian* (Islamic study), *mudik* (people returning to their home villages), to shaking hands during *halal bi halal* (meetings to celebrate the end of Ramadan), all involve crowds of people.

It is true that some of these activities, like *pengajian* and *tadarus*, can be conducted online. Others, such as *tarawih*, may be conducted at home, but many Muslims find this less than ideal. Some activities, however, can only be conducted at mosques, like *i'tikaf*. This devotion is not compulsory, only recommended, but under normal circumstances, mosques would be full of people performing *i'tikaf* during the final 10 days of Ramadan.

Jokowi administration seems to be reluctant imposing strict prohibitions for people gathering at the Worship Places during this COVID-19 pandemic. It could trigger a political move from Islamist political parties that Muslims become the target of such policy. Feeling alienated from their peers and pushing them only to pray at their homes would only make them more fundamentalist. They can easily express their hatreds toward the government. Although the rule should apply to all believers, not only to Muslims, but it is not an easy task to handle the matter in the largest Muslim country in the world. At the same time, allowing them to gather and pray at the Mosques would make the government's job to handle the spread of COVID-19 more difficult. Just like what Jokowi did with his compromising policy on *mudik*, we can sense that Jokowi is doing the same with those strict believers.

Concluding Remarks

Indonesia is facing many obstacles in dealing with COVID-19. Social distancing is extremely difficult owing to the high population density in large cities. It also affects people who work in public spaces and on the street as they will not eat if they are forced to stay at home and, let alone the very large number of people live in informal urban settlements in conditions where social distancing is simply impossible. However, this chapter has demonstrated that

⁵² Katharina R Lestari, 'Indonesian fatwa urges Eid prayers at home', *UCA News*, 15 May 2020 available at <https://www.ucanews.com/news/indonesian-fatwa-urges-eid-prayers-at-home/88028> (accessed on 15 May 2020)

Jokowi administration could have done much works in anticipating the huge impact of COVID19 if they took the issue seriously in January; and not wait 2 months afterwards.

Other factors contributing to the ineffective and inefficient of his government's response has been examined in the chapter. Political rivalry between the central government and the Jakarta governor, long dispute between the Indonesian Medical Association (IDI) and the current Health Minister, together with lack of coordination, unclear policy and conflicting statements from members of Jokowi's cabinet, as well as strict believers who insist to ignore government's regulation on praying at home, all lead to a disaster of handling the COVID-19 matters. What Jokowi government has done is considered too little and too late. A hard lesson for his early second term as the President.