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INDONESIA RECRUITS MILLENNIAL TALENTS

Indonesia's President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo recently appointed seven young people as members of his new presidential expert staff to give him innovative ideas in regard to the country's development in various fields.

Among the new expert staff members are education technology startup Ruangguru CEO and founder Adamas Belva Syah Devara, Amarta Fintech founder Andi Taufan Garuda Putra, Creativepreneur CEO Putri Tanjung and Kitong Bisa CEO Gracia Billy Mambrasar.

Their ages range between 23 and 36 years old, with the youngest being the 1996-born Putri - who is also the daughter of media mogul Chairil Tanjung.

"I'm also surprised that [she] is still 23 years old," Jokowi said briefly upon introducing her and the other staff members at the Presidential Palace in Jakarta.

Jokowi gave special shout-outs to Billy, a 31-year-old native Papuan who had won a scholarship and took his master's in the United Kingdom's Oxford University, as well as Angkie, who is a deaf and well-known for advocating for deaf people's rights.

"I have asked Angkie to be my spokesperson in social affairs," Jokowi said.

He said the young staff members would discuss various issues with the president and provide him with "fresh and innovative ideas so we can find a new way to take a leap to reach for advancement".

"They should also become the bridges between me and young santri [Islamic boarding school students] and young diaspora in many places across the world," Jokowi said.

Jokowi had earlier announced the other five members, most of whom had worked with him since his first-term administration, including academics Anak Agung Gde Ngurah Ari Dwipayana and Sukardi Rinakit, and economist Arif Budimanta.

“As members of the presidential expert staff, they will be my partners in discussion every month, every week or every day, ” Jokowi added. “With them, I can look for out-of-the-box ideas.”

These appointments, however, have not been the most jaw-dropping picks in Jokowi’s new presidential team. Last month, he appointed his two-time challenger Prabowo Subianto as the country’s Defence Minister. According to The Diplomat, diehard Jokowi supporters saw the move as an expert level decision to keep enemies closer, but for many, it was too close for comfort.

Then there is the “GoMinister” - founder of ride-hailing service Gojek, Nadiem Makarim, 35, who was named Minister for Education and Culture.

In the international tech world, the announcement was met with confused bemusement while domestically, questions about Makarim’s credentials in education lingered, said The Diplomat.

One main doubt was whether Makarim was the right person to shape the policy needed to improve training and education for the next generation of workers. Like many affluent Indonesians, Makarim was educated abroad and eventually picked up an MBA at Harvard. He has used that education to build an iconic company which has changed the way the country functions, but it has had a downside. As The Diplomat pointed out, GoJek has played a major role in entrenching a gig economy at the exact moment Indonesia needed to begin embracing its very young demographic dividend.

The appointment of these millennial presidential staffers should nonetheless pacify progressive young voters who felt snubbed by Jokowi’s inaction on the haze and the response to conflict in Papua prior to the inauguration.

In the April election, the disenchanted cohort had started an informal vote campaign called Golput, which urged youth to mark their ballot to indicate no candidate is acceptable. The Jokowi campaign team launched a counter campaign in response: “jangan golput”, or “do not golput”. While it’s not officially known how many voters deliberately golput, final figures on accepted votes suggested that number was low.

Here is the who’s who of Jokowi’s new millennial presidential expert team:

Angkie Yudistia

“Hi, my name is Angkie, ” she said, spelling her name in sign language with her right hand.

The 32-year-old with hearing impairment is a social entrepreneur, an activist for the disabled community and an author. She is the founder and

chief executive officer (CEO) of Thisable Enterprise, an organization that supports the employment of disabled people.

One of Thisable's projects is to partner with ride-hailing app provider Gojek to employ people with disabilities in Gojek's services like GoAuto for automotive services and GoGlam for beauty services.

Angkie has published three books - Perempuan Tuna Rungu Menembus Batas (A Deaf Woman without Limits) in 2011, Setinggi Langit (As High As The Sky) in 2013 and Become Rich As a Socio-preneur in 2019.

"Here comes the time when [people with] disabilities are no longer seen as minority. We are equal. By becoming a member of the presidential expert staff, it's my chance to create an inclusive environment. Wish me luck, " she said.

Adamas Belva Syah Devara

The 29-year-old is the founder and CEO of education technology startup Ruangguru. He holds a Master of Public Administration and Master of Business Administration from Harvard University and Stanford University in the US, respectively.

In 2017, Forbes listed Belva under its "30 under 30 Asia" for establishing the startup, which connected private tutors with students in Indonesia.

Belva said it would have been "unimaginable" under the previous administration or in other countries for "young people like us to enter the circle of the State Palace".

"This shows a huge commitment from the president to involve the millennial generation in public policy, " he said.

Belva said he and other young staff members had different areas of expertise, but he underlined the importance of maximizing technology in the delivery of public services.

"In health care, finance and taxes, for instance, perhaps we can think about new ways to apply technology so that we are not left behind other countries."

Gracia Billy Mambrasar

The 31-year-old native Papuan is the CEO and founder of Kitong Bisa, a foundation focusing on education that operates learning centers for Papuan children with the help of volunteers.

After graduating from the Bandung Institute of Technology, Billy obtained scholarships to study at the Australian National University (ANU) and Oxford University. Sponsored by the Finance Ministry's Endowment Fund for Education

(LPDP) scholarship program, Billy will soon pursue his doctorate in human development at Harvard.

In 2017, he was made an envoy of the Indonesian government to speak about education in the United Nations headquarters in New York.

“We are committed to help the President and the government not to work in ‘business-as-usual’ mode, but we will try to implement modernity and technology to realize more effective and efficient governance,” Billy said.

Billy, who worked for nine years to teach children in remote areas about entrepreneurship, said he would bring his experience to help the government reach out to the country’s outer regions through digital means.

He said that he and Jokowi were committed to “building Indonesia from Papua”.

“All along the [narrative] is to develop Papua from Indonesia, but now we will build Indonesia from Papua.”

Putri Indahsari Tanjung

The youngest of the seven, 23-year-old Putri is the CEO and founder of Creativepreneur Event Creator, an organization she created when she was 15 and through which Putri educates young people about entrepreneurship.

The eldest daughter of media mogul Chairil Tanjung, Putri recently graduated from the Academy of Arts in San Fransisco, US, majoring in multimedia communication. She is also the Chief Business Officer of creative platform Kreavi.

Putri said she hoped to voice the aspirations of young people to the President. “I’ve always believed there was huge potential for creative economy in Indonesia. We need young talent, especially in this digital era.”

Andi Taufan Garuda Putra

A Harvard Kennedy School of Government’s graduate, Taufan is known for his entrepreneurship and innovation in helping micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the country.

The 32-year-old is the CEO and founder of Amatha, a peer-to-peer lending platform certified by the Financial Services Authority (OJK) that helped MSME players in areas across the country access funding.

Ayu Kartika Dewi

An activist promoting diversity and tolerance, Ayu is the co-founder of SabangMerauke, an intra-national student exchange program that aims to foster cultural diversity. The 36-year old has an MBA from Duke University in the US.

With regard to Jokowi's target on developing quality human capital, Ayu said that it would be important for young people to develop skills in critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration, which she believed were also keys to promote peace and tolerance in the country.

"If people are able to think critically, Indonesia will be more advanced," she said. "When we are talking about tolerance, it's correlated to people's critical thinking ability."

Aminuddin Ma'ruf

Aminuddin was chairman of the Indonesian Islamic Students Movement (PMII) for the 2014-2016 period. Born in Karawang, West Java, the 33-year-old was introduced by Jokowi as santri (Islamic boarding school student).

After graduating from Jakarta State University, he took his master degree at Trisakti University in Jakarta. Aminuddin was assigned by Jokowi to help create innovation to encourage Islamic boarding schools to develop talented students to contribute in the country's development. - The Jakarta Post/Asia News Network

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