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The Ceremony of "Numplak Wajik"

A ceremony preparing the Gunungan (cone-shaped) "wajik", made of sticky rice cooked with sugar and coconut cream. The moment the Wajik is turned over on the big round wooden tray (the base of the gunungan), people simultaneously beat rice mortars rhythmically in regular cadence marks the completion of gunungan. The ceremony starts at 3 pm on Wednesday, January 7, 2009 held at the Palace in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

source: www.my-indonesia.info

RI Consistently Supports Palestinian Struggle

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said the Indonesian government remained consistent in supporting the struggle of the Palestinian people to maintain their rights and sovereignty.

Addressing a mass gathering to observe Islamic New Year 1430 Hijriyah at Istiqlal mosque here on Tuesday (30/12), President Yudhoyono said Indonesia's support to Palestine was realized

in its call on Israel to end its air strikes on the Gaza Strip. "Israel's unproportionally all-out war on Hamas with a great number of fatalities is an unforgettable human tragedy," the president said. (read more on page 1)

Top five quotes in this issue:

- ◆ "We invite all parties to help stop the Israeli attacks and we will continue to support the Palestinian struggle" (page 1)
- ◆ "... Indonesia's deep concern over the tragic situation in the Gaza Strip had caused the death of over 375 civilians and the injury to over 1500 Palestinians" (page 1)
- ◆ "POSCO, the world's fourth-largest steelmaker is considering investments in Indonesia as part of an effort to expand its overseas presence" (page 4)
- ◆ "Diversity should not create discrimination and egoism. There should be no racial groups who think they are superior above others" (page 10)
- ◆ "... we are the best in the creative economic sector especially in culture-, heritage- and local values-based economy" (page 10)

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DOMESTIC ISSUES

Political Issues

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Addressing a mass gathering to observe Islamic New Year 1430 Hijriyah at Istiqlal mosque here on Tuesday (30/12), President Yudhoyono said Indonesia's support to Palestine was realized in its call on Israel to end its air strikes on the Gaza Strip.

"Israel's unproportionally all-out war on Hamas with a great number of fatalities is an unforgettable human tragedy," the president said.

Meanwhile, AFP reported that Israeli warplanes pounded Gaza for a fourth day on Tuesday as tanks stood by to join the all-out war. Israel had vowed to wipe out Hamas, and the Palestinian death toll rose to at least 360.

Israel made it clear Monday (29) the offensive was just beginning, even as UN chief Ban Ki-moon urged world leaders to work urgently to end the "unacceptable" violence.

Indonesia, according to President Yudhoyono, strongly condemned the Israeli air strikes and urged the United Nations to take concrete steps to bring the aggression to an end.

"We invite all parties to help stop the Israeli attacks and we will continue to support the Palestinian struggle," Yudhoyono said.

The president has earlier sent a letter to the United Nations and UN Security Council, calling on the world's bodies to

issue a resolution for Israel to halt its strikes on Gaza Strip.

"Indonesia finds it necessary for the UN Security Council to make a formal meeting and issue a resolution to force Israel halt its aggression," Yudhoyono said.

In his letter, President Yudhoyono also called on Israel and Palestine to return to a peace process like they did half year ago to create peace and security at Gaza Strip.

The president explained that he would maintain communication with Indonesian permanent representative at the United Nations, Marty Natalegawa, to obtain information about measures taken by the UN Security Council to have Israel stop its military aggression. (The Jakarta Post)

RI Condemns Israeli Actions at UNSC Emergency Meeting

Jakarta - Indonesia, during an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council (UNSC) to discuss the latest situation in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday (31/12), condemned Israel's brutal air strikes which had killed over 400 Palestinians.

Marty Natalegawa, the Indonesian permanent representative to the UN Headquarters in New York, expressed Indonesia's deep disappointment about the barbaric Zionist violence, according to a release from the permanent representative's office on Thursday.

"My delegation would like to begin by expressing in the clearest manner possible, its outrage and strong condemnation of the continued military onslaught by Israel in the Gaza Strip.

"For days now, we have all been witnessing the excessive and disproportionate use of force by Israel; of collective punishment of innocent civilians in contravention of international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Convention," he said.

Marty reminded that at least 1.5 million Palestinian citizens in the Gaza Strip were currently living in fear, while

many of the innocents like women and children were killed.

Indonesia was also concerned about international humanitarian workers as most of them were facing the risk of being killed and injured in implementing their humanitarian mission to the region.

At the emergency meeting on Thursday, non-permanent member of UNSC Libya representing the Arab world proposed a draft resolution which in principle slammed the Israeli air strikes and ordered a stop to the Israeli aggression in addition to the opening of streets to let humanitarian assistance flow to Gaza.

The draft resolution also contained a call on the international community to protect civilians in the Gaza Strip and to overcome humanitarian problem in the region, and stressed the importance of creating a peaceful situation in the region.

The holding of the UNSC emergency meeting accorded with Indonesia's recent call on the Council to take steps like the issuance of UNSC resolution if Israeli stance remained unchanged, as Zionist country often defied international law. (ANTARA)

House Condemns Israeli Strikes on Gaza

Jakarta (ANTARA) - The Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR) on Sunday (28/12) condemned Israeli air strikes on the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip a day earlier that killed more than 150 people and injured 200 others.

The act was form of human rights violation and crime against humanity which deserved international condemnation, the DPR Caucus for Palestine said here in a statement.

The caucus called on the Indonesian government to use all available diplomatic channels, including the United Nations, the Organization for Islamic Conference ((OIC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to stop the Israeli attacks, and ensure that relief aid from the Indonesian people would reach Gaza.

It also urged the House leadership to encourage other members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to exclude Israel from the IPU membership because of their crimes against the Palestinian people and parliament.

In addition, it also urged leaders of Saudi Arabia and other Islamic countries to put an immediate halt to the Israeli brutal attacks, send relief aid to the Palestinian people in Gaza Strip and sever all forms of diplomatic and business ties with Israel.

The caucus further asked Muslims all over the world to pray for the safety of Palestinian people and extend relief aid to help alleviate their hardship.(ANTARA)

President : RI Often Misunderstood

Jakarta - President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said here on Friday (19/12) many parties often had wrong perceptions on Indonesia and this had created prejudices.

"I remember when I met with Colin Powell from the US while I was a cabinet minister. At the time he said Indonesia was a country that had often been understood in a wrong way," he said in his speech when launching a book he had compiled , titled "Indonesia Unggul" (Indonesia on the Move).

He said the religion which was embraced by most Indonesian population, namely Islam, was also often treated in the same way.

"I often brief foreigners on Islam. Islam is also often being understood in the wrong way," he said.

In view of that, he said as a head of state he had an obligation to make them understand through a variety of methods including writing a book.

"Indonesia Unggul" is the Indonesian version of "Indonesia on the Move" containing a number of President Yudhoyono's speeches and ideas on various aspects and issues.

"In this book, I talk much about democracy and various other issues," he said.

He said as a nation Indonesia had extraordinary potentials and one of them was solidarity and independence.

Since the time it was founded, the country had experienced all sorts of difficulties and was often seen as unable to stand. However, he said, the challenges had even made the nation strong and united.

Therefore, he called on all parties to continue developing positive thinking to promote civilization in the country.(ANTARA)

Parliament Passes Four Bills Into Laws

Jakarta - The House of Representatives (DPR) in a plenary session at Parliament Building here on Wednesday (17/12) endorsed the passage of four bills into laws.

The four bills are the bill on aviation, the bill on education legal status, the bill on tourism, and the bill on the US Convention against Organized Transnational Crimes.

The Bill on Aviation was endorsed after the DPR's political factions voices their final views and Transportation ministers Jusman Syafii Djamal expressed the government's opinion on the bill.

The plenary session was chaired by Deputy House Speaker Muhaimin Iskandar.

The DPR is expected to conclude deliberations of 157 bills until the end of its sitting on December 19, 2008.

On Tuesday (16/12), the DPR passed two bills, namely on the Indonesian export financing institution, and on the mineral and coal mining, into laws.

In addition to the plenary session, the DPR also held a discussion and a bazaar to commemorate the Mothers' Day.

The discussion was organized by the Women's Caucus at the Parliament. The discussion's theme is "Improvement of Female Legislative Candidates in Developing Networking".

Among the discussion's speakers were Eva Sundari (PDIP), Latifah Iskandar (PAN), and Erni Anggraeni and Andriana Venny from the NGO

Coalition.(ANTARA)

Do Not Make Global Crisis as Political Commodity, President Says

Jakarta - President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has said the global financial crisis and its impact on Indonesia should not be made as political commodity.

In his address to observe the 50th anniversary of National Social Solidarity Day (HKSAN) at National Monument (Monas) square here on Tuesday (23/12), the president said the global crisis and its impact on Indonesia were commented differently by various parties in the country.

The president pointed out that some of the comments on the global financial crisis and its impact on Indonesia were incorrect and had political nuances.

According to the president, such an opinion did not sharpen the national way of thinking but just a waste of time.

"Some people say the world situation is safe and good and there is no problem at all with the global crisis, while some others say it does not have any impact on Indonesia. But let us not waste our time by giving inaccurate and dishonest opinion with political nuances to that issue," President Yudhoyono said.

Amidst various opinions about the impact of the global financial crisis on Indonesia, President Yudhoyono said the government would continue to work hard to go ahead with the national development toward the improvement of people's welfare.

On the occasion, the president expressed his special gratitude to Social Affairs Minister Bachtiar Chamsyah, state enterprises (BUMN), and private companies who had given their positive contribution to the people through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program, and to various non-government organizations (NGOs), as well as the social workers for their contribution in empowering the people.

The head of state also called on all national elements to maintain social solidarity in the midst of the crisis.

"The social solidarity movement

should be stepped up even more in the face of national and international developments," Yudhoyono said, adding that the central and provincial governments should try to do their best in improving the people's welfare. (ANTARA)

Economic Issues

President Hails Governors' Commitment to Boost Food Production

Jakarta - President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono hailed the governors' commitment to increase food production and sustainability in their respective areas.

The commitment was made in a Food Sustainability Conference on November 14, 2008 and read out by Central Kalimantan governor, Teras Narang before the president in the presentation of National Rice Production Increase and Food Sustainability 2008 awards at the Presidential Palace here Thursday (18/12).

"I am excited to hear the conference results of Food Sustainability Board delivered by Central Kalimantan governor, Teras Narang. The contents are very good," he said.

He welcomed the commitment of governors and even regents as well as mayors to increase the food sustainability.

The governors who are also chairs of Regional Food Sustainability Board were committed to decreasing the number of starving population as an indicator of poverty of a minimum of one percent per year until 2015 which is in line with Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

To achieve this, the governors were committed to allocating adequate budget according to their region's capability.

The Governors also promised to increase nutrition and healthcare services for the poor integrated with poverty eradication and family planning program in order to realize Indonesia's Nutrition and Food Sustainability in 2015.

To upgrade food sustainability the administration heads promised to speed

up food diversity and increase local food image by appreciating, protecting and developing local foods.

One of the efforts to stabilize food supply and prices was the regional administration commitment to establish and develop food reserve coordination with regency and municipality administrations.

Besides, the governors also guaranteed production means and infrastructure availability especially efficient fertilizer procurement, land function shifting control and proper agricultural technology application.

They also planned to set particular days of consuming local food and encourage school canteens and village food stalls to use local foods.(ANTARA)

Posco Mulling Investment in Indonesia

Seoul - POSCO, the world's fourth-largest steelmaker, said on Wednesday it is considering investments in Indonesia as part of an effort to expand its overseas presence.

On Tuesday (16/12), Reuters reported that POSCO is in talks with state-owned PT Krakatau Steel to build a mill with a production capacity of up to 3.1 million tons in Cilegon, West Java.

"Nothing has been decided yet and we are very cautious in pushing ahead with overseas investments due to the global financial crisis," said a POSCO official.

In May this year, the South Korean steelmaker said it was in talks with the Indonesian government to buy a stake in Krakatau.

Steel prices and demand have fallen sharply in the face of a global downturn, which has forced producers to scale back output and slash jobs.(ANTARA)

Small and Medium Businesses Provide 90 Percent of Employment

Jakarta - Indonesian micro-, small-and medium-sized businesses (UMKMa) provide 99 percent of total employment in the country accomodating up to 90 percent of the country's workers, a national development planning official

said.

"Indeed the UMKM provides employment for up to 90 percent of the Indonesian workers while big businesses contribute only 0.19 percent of employment that may accommodate 10 percent of the country's workforce but the UMKM's productivity is still low," the National Development Planning Board's (Bappenas) deputy head for evaluation of developmental performance, Dr Bambang Widianto, said here on Tuesday (16/12).

The UMKMs' productivity rate was only Rp23.13 million per person while that of big businesses was Rp728.4 million per person a year, he said.

In a discussion on the latest International Labor Organization (ILO) report, he said in view of that the development of big companies was as important as that of UMKMs.

He said micro-businesses contributed the biggest employment to Indonesia's total productive-age population, namely 62.51 percent accommodating up to 31.05 million workers followed by small businesses contributing 21.36 percent that absorbs 10.6 million workers, big businesses 9.59 percent involving 4.76 million workers and medium businesses providing 6.14 percent employment for 3.05 million workers.

"The cost spent by micro and small businesses indeed is small only Rp603,000 per person per month according to the 2006 economy census while medium businesses and big companies spend Rp2.4 million per person per month," he said.

In terms of investment he said small and medium businesses in 2007 only needed Rp9.27 million of investment per business unit while investment for big businesses reached Rp115.27 billion per business unit compared to total average investment per business unit in Indonesia that is recorded at Rp19.74 million.

He said quoting the ILO data Indonesia's Gross Domestic Product is recorded at 25.7 percent while workforce grows only 5.7 percent and unemployment grows 16.5 percent.

By comparison, he said, Malaysia' GDP is 24.4 percent and employment

growth reaches 8.4 percent while its unemployment growth is recorded at 6.1 percent. (ANTARA)

RI's 2008 Export Growth Estimated at 18-20 Percent : Minister

Manado, N Sulawesi - Trade Minister Mari Elka Pangestu expressed optimism that Indonesia's export growth in 2008 will reach about 18 to 20 percent.

"Indonesia's exports only began to decline in September while those in the preceding months all increased. So, we can expect an average increase by about 18 to 20 percent at the end of the year," the minister said here on Tuesday.

The minister made the remarks during a year-end discussion on the global crisis and its challenges at the Bank Indonesia's Manado branch office.

She said Indonesia was not experiencing a crisis as grave as that in the United States and Europe where there was minus growth due to drastically reduced demand.

The minister said the exposure to exports of Indonesia's gross domestic product (GDP) was about 30 percent while in Malaysia's case the figure was 110 percent, in Thailand's case 70 percent, in the Philippines' case 50 percent and in China's case 40 percent.

She said these ratios explained why in the other countries the decline in exports would directly affect the economy as a whole, while in Indonesia it would not.

Indonesia's exports were also relatively safer than those of other countries because, besides different markets and commodities, Indonesia had also succeeded in diversifying its markets.

She said Indonesia's exports to Europe in 2003 accounted for 19 percent of its overall exports but the figure dropped to 1.5 percent in 2008 while its exports to the United States fell from 15 percent (of overall exports) in 2003 to 11.3 percent in 2008.

"The reductions in these overseas market shares indicate that there has been market diversification in Indonesia's exports which go to newly emerging markets such as China where Indonesia's

market share increased from 6 percent to 8 percent, India from 3 percent to 6 percent and in ASEAN countries," the minister said.

Indonesia's exports were also safe because they mostly consisted of commodities. Unlike electronics and automotive products which are directly affected when demand drops, commodities are not directly affected, she said. (ANTARA)

Government to Set Economic Priorities for 2009

Jakarta - The Indonesian government plans to set seven priorities in 2009 to maintain the country's economic growth.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said at a press conference after conducting a coordination meeting with the acting coordinating minister for the economy here on Wednesday (31/12) that he had heard a report from the minister and discussed fundamental problems with regard to the 2009 budget management.

"Tonight the finance ministry will work overtime to make a note on everything affecting state earnings and the current position of the 2008 budget with regard to revenues, expenditures and deficit as well as its implementation in ministries, government institutions and in regional administrations to see the budget's performance," the president said.

The President said the seven priorities were firstly overcoming poverty and new unemployment stemming from current global financial crisis and secondly controlling inflation.

"The policies we are taking such as the fiscal incentive from the finance ministry are meant to save the real sector so that companies may keep their workers and would not conduct lay-offs," he said.

Another priority is safeguarding the people's buying power. "We will raise the civil servants' salary again next year as well as extending a 13th salary to them. Those who have no salary the government has budget programs for them such as cash assistance," he said.

The government will also assure food and energy sufficiency. "Thank God this year we can be self-sufficient in rice

while people also started using gas," he said.

"We always monitor international prices and in time we will adjust the price of fuel oils in the country according to the international prices and also our budget capacity," he said.

The seventh priority was maintaining the economic growth. President Yudhoyono said the country's economy grew by six percent in 2008 which was good in the midst of current crisis.

He said as all countries corrected their growth forecast down for next year he hoped the country could still maintain a reasonable growth rate.

"I hope it could be above four percent. It is a realistic figure. Even if we want to work harder it may still be higher. So let us start the year 2009 in full spirits," he said. (ANTARA)

Government Aims to Draw \$25 Billion Investment in Energy Sector

Jakarta - The government has set the target of investment in the energy and mineral resources sector for 2009 at US\$25.4 billion compared to US\$21.7 billion it plans to attract this year.

"Next year's investment in the sector is expected to create jobs for around 148,900 people," Head of the Legal Affairs and Public Relations Bureau at the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry Sutisna Prawira said here on Thursday (18/12).

He said investment in the oil and gas sector was projected at US\$16.6 billion, or 66 percent of the total investment target.

The US\$16.6 billion investment consisted of investment in the upstream oil and gas sector covering old and new oil and gas blocks and coal bed methane blocks, and investment in the downstream oil and gas sector including two mini oil refineries, one used lubricant refinery, three liquefied petroleum gas refineries, and gas pipelines, he said.

Investment in the electricity sector was projected at US\$6.6 billion, or 26 percent of the total investment target, he said.

The electricity projects cover state-run power plants with a combined capacity of 10,000 MW and privately-run power plants with a combined capacity of 15,629 MW, he said.

Investment in the general mining sector was expected to reach US\$2.1 billion, or 8 percent of the total investment target, he said.

The government has set itself a target of attracting US\$21.7 billion in investment this year, consisting of US\$14.8 billion in the oil and gas sector, US\$5.4 billion in the electricity sector, and US\$1.5 billion in the general mining sector. (ANTARA)

Investment Commitments in Energy and Mineral Sector 2009 Reach US\$28.6 Billion

Jakarta - Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Purnomo Yusgiantoro said the value of investment commitments in Indonesia's energy and mineral resource sector for 2009 had already reached US\$28.6 billion.

The figure was US\$10 billion higher than the value of realized investments in 2008 which was expected to total US\$18.63 billion, the minister said here Tuesday (30/12).

The investment commitments in 2009 included commitments made during the 3rd Indonesia-China Energy Forum (ICEF) held several days ago that reached US\$3.2 billion, he said.

He said of the US\$21.7 billion worth of commitments targeted in 2008 only US\$18.63 billion was achieved.

This was probably because other commitments were not yet reported or because the target was not met.

However, he believed the target of investment in 2008 would be above that of 2007 which reached only US\$15.75 billion in value.

Realization of investment in 2008 was expected in the oil and gas sector (US\$12.2 billion), electricity (US\$4.76 billion) and general mining (US\$1.65 billion).

Realization of investment in 2007 meanwhile was recorded in the oil and

gas sector (US\$11.18 billion), electricity (US\$3.3 billion) and general mining (US\$1.26 billion).

Apart from the result of the third ICEF, investment commitments in 2009, reached US\$25.4 billion including in the gas and oil sector that reached US\$16.6 billion or 66 of the total investment targets.

The investment commitments are in existing oil and gas fields, new fields and coal bed methane fields.

The commitments in the downstream includes a mini-oil refinery, a used lubricant oil refinery, three mini-liquefied petroleum gas refineries, pipe-channeled gas transportation, LPG stockpile, fuel oil stockpile, liquefied natural gas stockpile, fuel oil trading and gas pipe network.

Investment in the electricity sector is expected to reach US\$6.6 billion or 26 percent.

The electricity projects include part of the government 10,000 MW power development projects and 15,629 MW private power projects.

Investment commitments in the general mining sector meanwhile reached US\$2.1 billion or eight percent of the target. The investment commitments may provide employment for 148,000 workers. (ANTARA)

BI to Continue Promoting Shariah-Based Economy

Jakarta - Bank Indonesia (BI) governor Boediono said here on Tuesday (23/12) that the central bank would continue promoting the shariah-based economic system in the country.

"There must be no doubt that BI supports the development of shariah-based economy," he said in his speech when installing executive board members of the Shariah Economic Community (MES).

He said right now the world was looking forward to a shariah economy following its disappointment over the present economic system that had led to an economic crisis.

He said BI did not only support from outside but also inside the organization

for the development of the economic system. "At least two BI deputy governors are board members of the Shariah Economic Community. So it is guaranteed," he said.

Two BI deputy governors, namely Muliaman Hadad, is general chairman of the MES, and Siti Fadjriah as MES' deputy to the advisory board.

Muliaman Hadad after his instalment said he would continue developing the shariah-based economic system because it could be one of the supporting factors of the country's economy.

"I think it needs to be articulated again that the shariah-based economic system is not only an economic foundation for preventing an economic crisis like we are experiencing now but it is also a solution to a crisis," he said.

Former MES chairman Aries Muftie meanwhile said that according to a World Bank report in 2020 Indonesia would be one of the countries with a strong economy. "And according to the report the development of the country's economy is supported by its shariah-based financial sector," he said.

In view of that, he said the development of the shariah-based economic system had to be boosted to support national development.

"Right now the shariah-based economy only contributes not more than three percent of the country's total economy. It has to be further boosted to support the national economy," he said. (ANTARA)

Indonesia to Open New Trade Promotion Centers Abroad

Jakarta - Indonesia plans to open 11 new Indonesian Trade Promotion Centers (ITPC) abroad at the end of this year, the head of the National Export Development Agency (BPEN), Bachrul Chairi, said here on Tuesday (16/12).

The new ITPCs are located in Shanghai (China), Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), Mexico City (Mexico), Chicago (the US), Busan (South Korea), Chennai (India), Barcelona (Spain), Lyon (France), Santiago (Chili), Vancouver (Canada) and

Lagos (Nigeria).

Chairi said the decision was part of the country's efforts in seeking new export markets particularly in those regions.

"The state minister for administrative reform and the foreign minister have agreed to the opening of the new ITPCs which are expected to start operating by the end of this year," he said.

Indonesia has so far already operated nine ITPCs in business cities like Sao Paolo (Brazil), Los Angeles (the US), Milan (Italy), Johannesburg (South Africa), Dubai, Osaka, Sydney and Budapest (Hungary).

Chairi said the 11 countries where the new ITPCs would be established were the world's trade hubs that had high per capita income and buying power as well as potentials to import products from Indonesia.

"Indonesia's export market share in those countries is still relatively small and may still be increased while those countries are also a gateway for exports to their neighbours," he said.

Chairi said the ITPCs which cost Rp4 billion each could be used as an exhibition venue for world products.

He said one of the reasons for establishing the new ITPCs in those countries was that those countries generally have big ports to support exports and imports.

In the 2009 budget the Indonesian government allocates Rp86 billion to increase ITPCs and operate 20 others. (ANTARA)

Indonesia to Host World Islamic Economic Conference

Jakarta - Indonesia will host the World Islamic Economic Conference (WIEF) here on March 1-4, 2009, the chief organizer said here on Thursday (18/12).

Deputy Chairman of the Regional Representatives Council (DPD), who is also chairman of the WIEF Steering Committee, Irman Gusman, said the WIEF will focus on food security, energy and bottom line business handling of financial crisis.

"This forum is of vitally importance

because Islamic countries, particularly those in the Middle East, are no longer backward," Irman Gusman said.

He said that countries in the Middle East had surplus funds amounting to US\$1.5 trillion which were deposited in a funding facility called Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWF), or Sovereign Welfare Funds (SWF).

"SWF was set up as a state-owned financial institution to serve as an investment instrument overseas," he said adding that other countries like Singapore, Malaysia and China had also set up similar funding facilities," Gusman said.

Indonesia is expected to take advantage of the SWF to face the world economic crisis by asking owners of the surplus funds to invest in Indonesia.

"We can take the advantage of the Beijing-Dubai-New Delhi axis. Here lies our future," he said.

He said that at present China, India and the Middle East were now leading the front line in settling the global economic problem.(ANTARA)

Socio - Cultural Issues

Indonesia Sends USD200,000 Package of Medicine to Palestine

A team of three members representing Indonesia's Medical Emergency Rescue Committee (MER-C) will soon left for Palestine to give medical aid to Palestinian victims of Israeli air strikes in the Gaza strip.

MER-C spokesman dr Jose Rizal said here on Monday (29/12) that the team would bring medical and logistic aids to the Palestinian people at Gaza Strip.

"The MER-C representative will try to enter Gaza through Egypt and if they were denied access, they would leave the medical and logistic aids at the border," Jose Rizal said.

He said the three representatives from MER-C was made up of two doctors and a logistic manager.

According to Jose Rizal, the Indonesian government through the Health Ministry would send medical and logistic supplies and cash of more than Rp2 billion to the Palestinian people suffering from Israeli air strikes.

In addition, the Health Ministry is currently preparing a USD200,000 package of medicines to be sent to Palestine. Head of the centre for crisis control dr Rustam S Pakaya made the remark through an SMS message to Antara here on Sunday evening following the Israeli air strike on civilian targets.

"The health ministry will send a USD200,000 package of medicines under the coordination of the foreign ministry," he said.(ANTARA)

TNI Prepares C-130 Hercules to Fly Aid to Palestine

Jakarta - The Indonesian military (TNI) headquarters has prepared a C-130 Hercules transport aircraft to carry humanitarian aid to Palestine, a spokesman said.

The TNI headquarters' spokesman, Sagom Tamboen, said here on Tuesday (30/12) the TNI had so far only prepared one aircraft but it was not impossible it would make more planes available for the purpose. "But it will all depend on how much aid needs to be sent there," he said.

The Indonesian government has strongly condemned the Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip in Palestine. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said he had written to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and UN Security Council president Neven Jurica to ask for an immediate UN meeting to produce a resolution to stop the attacks.

Israel and Palestine have been urged to return to the negotiating table to make peace.

In the letter to the UN Secretary General President Yudhoyono also appealed to the world to immediately help the Palestinians who were now in trouble.

The Indonesian government was also planning to give US\$1 million in cash to help Palestine, apart from medical

supplies that would be sent to the conflict-torn region.

"We are continuing to monitor developments in Gaza. Indonesia will do what it can at regional as well as multilateral levels to defuse the conflict there," the President said.

More than 300 people have been killed including 57 civilians, children and women and at least 1,400 others have been wounded in the Israeli attacks.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has asked Israel to immediately stop its attacks on Gaza and allow humanitarian aid to reach the Palestinian victims.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, had also asked Israel to adhere to international laws, particularly in the use of military force and in attacks on civilians. (ANTARA)

President Celebrates Christmas with Christians in North Sulawesi

Manado, N Sulawesi - President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono called on Christians who celebrated Christmas here to develop and nurture noble values in an effort to build the country into an excellent nation.

"I hope all Christians would build the country's noble values and civilization so that it would reinforce the nation's self-reliance and excellence," the president said when attending Christmas celebrations at the North Sulawesi Governor's Guest House here on Thursday (24/12) night.

He said that adopting an optimism attitude in life could become an asset for the country to develop itself into a self-reliant nation with excellent civilization.

In another part of his address the president said that the diversity of Indonesia should not restrict the people to unite as one nation. "Diversity should not create discrimination and egoism. There should be no racial groups who think they are superior above others," the president said.

Yudhoyono called on Christians in North Sulawesi and in Indonesia in

general to continue developing life norms so far existing in the country such as the values of cooperation and harmony.

On the occasion the president was accompanied by his wife, Mrs Ani Yudhoyono. The event was also attended by North Sulawesi Governor Sarundajang, State Minister for People's Welfare Aburizal Bakrie, State Minister for Political, legal and Security Affairs Widodo AS, Religious Affairs Minister Maftuh Bayuni, Minister/State Secretary Hatta Radjasa and a number of regional administration officials. (ANTARA)

President Launches 2009 Indonesian Creative Year

Jakarta - President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono launched the Indonesian Creative Year 2009 as a follow up to the 2008 Indonesian Creative Month held in August 2008.

The launching took place amid the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of Mothers' Day at the Jakarta Convention Center here Monday (22/12).

"Creative economy is what Indonesia can do best. Do not ignore it because we are the best in the creative economic sector especially in culture-, heritage- and local values-based economy," the president said.

The head of state said that creative economy is a new economic sector besides agriculture, industries and services.

The president said that the creative economic sector is expected to open new employment vacancies and contribute to the Indonesian economy.

Meanwhile trade minister, Mari E Pangestu said that the 2009 Indonesian Creative Year is an implementation of the 2009-2025 creative economy development blue-print, expected to promote creative economic activities at home and abroad.

The 2009 Indonesian Creative Year target is increasing public understanding of creative economy to make them create innovative goods and service products as a future economic growth foundation of the country.

She said that the 2009 Indonesian Creative Year activities consisted of an exhibition of 14 creative economic sub-sectors, a film festival, fashion and music performances, a seminar, competition and award presentation.

To promote the development of creative economy the Indonesian Creative Economy Network (JEKI) will be activated as part of a network of stakeholders.

Through the JEKI it is expected that an exchange of information and experience will occur to increase the capacity of creative economic participants.

On the occasion, the President was accompanied by the first lady, Ani Yudhoyono, Vice President Jusuf Kalla, Mrs Mufidah Kalla, and cabinet ministers and their wives.

An Indonesian animation movie figure was introduced in the event. Si Kabayan is figured wearing trousers and a green cap, in white shirt and blue sarong across his chest.

Si Kabayan gave an advice on the need of developing creative economy through a song entitled "Budi Temanku" (Budi my friend). (ANTARA)

Irene becomes Indonesia's first Woman Grand Master

Indonesian chess princess Irene Kharisma Sukandar has topped off her haul of victories over Woman Grand Masters (WGM) and Woman International Masters (WIM) by earning her third norm, and with it, the coveted WGM title — the country's first.

The 16-year-old, holder of a WIM title, earned a norm during last month's Chess Olympiad in Dresden, Germany, and was presented with her new ranking by ASEAN Chess Confederation president Ignatius Leong, the Indonesian Chess Association (Percasi) said Wednesday (17/12) in a statement sent to *The Jakarta Post*.

Irene is in Singapore to compete in the Singapore Open chess tournament, running from Tuesday to Sunday.

She earned her norm after winning five matches, drawing three and losing one at the Dresden contest.

"Of course I'm happy (about becoming Indonesia's first WGM) and very grateful to God Almighty," Irene said in a text message to the *Post*.

She added she hoped her achievement could be repeated by other Indonesian women.

"I hope other (women chess players) will do the same now that the door has been opened. I've broken through it!" said Irene, who was named the best female player at the Malaysia Open chess tournament in Kuala Lumpur last August.

Irene is the first woman in Indonesian history to attain the chess world's highest title. By contrast, several Indonesian men have already attained the title of grand master. Among the country's few WIMs are Upi Darmayana Tamin, Lindri Juni Wijayanti, Lisa Karlina Lumongdong and Maria Ratna Lucia (no longer active).

Percasi secretary-general Harry Jaya Pahlawan admitted he was caught off guard by Irene's achievement.

"We thought she might have gotten her norm next year," he was quoted as saying in a statement.

"So we're happy at the news, keeping in mind how hard Irene's journey has been to write a new chapter in Indonesian history."(ANTARA)

President Presents Parahita Ekapraya Awards

Jakarta - President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono presented the Parahita Ekapraya Award to a number of institutions and regions on the 80th anniversary of Mother's Day at the Jakarta Convention Centre here Monday (22/12).

The Parahita Ekapraya award is a token of appreciation for heads of ministries, institutions and regional administrations who have a strong commitment to realizing gender equality and justice through evaluation on implementation of gender-responsive and women's empowerment policies.

This year the award was also presented for the first time to the heads of national institutions after previously meant only for heads of provinces, municipalities and regencies.

The award consists of three categories namely the 'utama' for regions that are considered to have successfully implemented women empowerment programs continuously through integrating gender issues in policies, program and development activities, 'madya' for regions that are considered to have successfully encouraged the development of women empowerment programs and initial efforts in gender issue integration, and 'pratama' for regions that are considered to have successfully placed women empowerment policies, programs and activities through gender equality strategy.

The 2008 award provincial level recipients are Central Java, Lampung, East Java, West Kalimantan, and West Sumatra (utama), Banten and Jambi (madya) and Riau Islands (pratama).

Meanwhile South Lampung, Temanggung, Brebes and Sragen in Central Java as well as Tulung Agung and Magelang in East Java received the award of regency or municipality level for utama category whereas Malang (Central Java) and Bandung (West Java) received the madya category.

For central government level the Attorney General's Office, Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration along with Minister of Public Works received the award of the pratama category.

The President was accompanied by first lady Ani Yudhoyono, Vice President Jusuf Kalla and his wife Mufidah Kalla in the celebration which carried the theme of "with the spirit of a century-old National Awakening we are increasing Indonesian Women's roles in national character building toward a just, democratic and prosperous nation."

The Mother's Day celebration referred to the first Indonesian Women's Union Conference on December 22, 1928 when women showed their roles to realize and defended national independence.

On the same occasion the Women Empowerment Minister, Health Minister and Manpower and Transmigration Minister signed a joint regulation on increasing opportunities for mothers breast-feeding their babies at their work place.

The regulation was made to accommodate women's rights as workers and to increase mother's breast-feeding program to the maximum in Indonesia. (ANTARA)

Award for Indonesian Hindu Leaders

Denpasar - The Young Hindu Award Committee again awarded Hindu leaders engaged in education, government, culture, health care and the environment.

"They received the award after a strict selection by a team formed by the committee," said event coordinator I Gusti Ayu Diah Werdhi Srikandi said here Friday (26/12).

She said that the award was an independent appreciation given annually to seek some Hindu leaders who would be recorded in Hindu history in Indonesia.

In the last seven years, in the 2000-2007 period the Young Hindu Award Committee, has awarded 46 figures and two Hindu Institutions considered meritorious in many aspects of life.

Ayu Diah said that the award was given for services and dedication in helping fellow man.

The award was expected to arouse young leaders to express and show good performance which could benefit their religion, nation, and country, Ayu Diah said. (ANTARA)

President Presents Awards to Public Healthcare Performers

Jakarta - President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono presented distinguished public health services awards to a number of government officials and private individuals at a National Health Day ceremony here Friday (19/12).

Among the government officials who received "Manggala Karya Bakti Husada Kartika" trophies at the ceremony held at

the Jakarta Fair grounds in Kemayoran were a number of provincial governors, district heads and town mayors.

Yogyakarta Governor Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X received the trophy as his province had been ranked the best in public health care terms by the health ministry.

The provinces rated the second and third best in public health terms were respectively Bali, represented by Governor I Made Mangku Pastika, and Central Java, represented by Governor Bibit Waluyo.

West Nusa Tenggara Governor M Zainul Majdi received a "Ksatria Bakti Husada Arutala" medal as his administration had allocated the biggest amount of regional budget funds to the health sector.

The president also handed similar awards to Metro Mayor Lukman Hakim and the head of Oku Timur district representing nine district/municipalities outside Java.

On the same occasion, the Health Minister presented other awards to several individuals who had rendered outstanding services in the health field.

They were Indonesian ambassador to Switzerland Makarim Wibisono who received a "Ksatria Bakti Husada Aditya" medal, and the head of the Cipto Mangunkusumo General Hospital's neurosurgery department, Prof RM Padmosantjojo, as a pioneer in neurosurgery in Indonesia, and for his success in an operation of the youngest Siamese twins, and Pelita Ilmu Foundation chairman Prof Samsuridjal Djauzi, Organization for Eradication of Tuberculosis (PPTI) chairman Ratih Siswono Yudhuhusodo, and Sinar Harapan daily reporter Web Warouw.

The function to mark the 44th National Health Day was themed "When the People Are Healthy, the Nation's Quality Will Increase."(ANTARA)

Foreign Tourists to Indonesia in 2008 Impressive

Jakarta - The tourism sector in 2008 has made two significant achievements, an

increase in the number of foreign tourists visiting Indonesia, and the amount of foreign exchange revenue, a minister said.

"The number of foreign tourists until the end of 2008 is predicted to reach more than 6 million, up by 16.85 percent from last year's 5.5 million," the Tourism and Cultural Minister, Jero Wacik, said here on Tuesday (23/12).

The tourism foreign exchange receipts in 2008 reached 7.65 billion USD, Wacik said. (ANTARA)

Papua's Raja Ampat to Help Promote South Halmahera Tourism

Ternate, N Maluku - The Raja Ampat District authorities in West Papua Province, will help promote tourism objects in South Halmahera District, North Maluku Province, to tourists visiting Raja Ampat.

Among the tourist objects to be promoted would be Widi Isles in East Gane Sub district, Muhammad Kasuba, the district head of South Halmahera, said here on Thursday (25/12).

East Gane Sub district is located in the border shared by Raja Ampat and South Halmahera.

Widi Isles have very beautiful marine panorama. A Dutch marine tourism businessman, who had visited the isles, described Widi's marine panorama as among the most beautiful in the world.

It took about five hours by a speed boat from Raja Ampat District to Widi Isles, which still have virgin forest and enchanting sandy beach, Kasuba said. (ANTARA)

Meutia Hatta Leads Ceremony to Observe Mothers Day

Jakarta - State Minister for Women's Empowerment Meutia Hatta led a ceremony to observe Mothers Day at Kalibata Heroes' Cemetery in South Jakarta on Friday (19/12) morning.

The ceremony was attended by a number of woman organizations such as Dharma Wanita (Association of Retired Civil Servants and the Wives of Civil Servants), Dharma Pertiwi (Association

of Military Wives), Bhayangkari (Policewomen, and Association of Policemen's Wives), Kowani (Indonesian Women's Congress), and PKK (Family Welfare Movement).

After the ceremony, Meutia Hatta and the members of the women's organizations would sprinkle petals on a number of tombs.

"The peak event of the Mothers Day will be conducted next Monday, December 22 in Jakarta where President Susilo Bambang Yudhono is going to deliver scientific address on Indonesian Women, the Present Challenge and Struggle," Meutia Hatta said.

She expressed hope that in this 80th Mothers Day anniversary, the Indonesian women would realize the importance of struggle to face the present globalization era.

"We are in a reform era at the moment, and it means the Indonesian women should be able to make something different to the nation. Although it is difficult indeed, all have to move forward to attain a successful future," said the state minister for women's empowerment.(ANTARA)

UNICEF Inaugurates Four Maternity Centers in Aceh Besar

Medan - The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) inaugurated four rural maternity centers (Polindes) in Aceh Besar District, Aceh Province, recently.

The community-based and integrated rural maternity centers would help deliver the country's healthy younger generation, Jean Metenier, the head of the UNICEF office in Aceh and Nias, told ANTARA.

The maternity centers would provide basic health and midwifery services, basic education service for under-six-year old children and accommodation for a midwife.

The rural maternity centers were respectively located in Lampuuk, Mon Ikeun, Meunasah Masjid Lamhlom, and Meunasah Krueng Kala, Aceh Besar District,

The maternity Center in Lampuuk

could serve up to 500 families.

UNICEF plans to build a total of 160 rural maternity centers in Aceh Province and Nias Island (North Sumatra). So far, 14 centers have been constructed, and the rest will be built in 2009.

"We have constructed Polindes as parts of the program of community health center (Posyandu Plus), with the assistance of the German National Community for UNICEF, and the United Arab Emirates, to help improve the health of mothers and children who have become victims of tsunami," Jean Metenier said.

Aceh Province and Nias Island had been devastated by a 8.9-magnitude earthquake and a subsequent deadly tsunami, which killed around 200,000 people and rendered about one million others homeless. (ANTARA)

ENVIRONMENT

Government Sets Up National Council on Climate Change

Jakarta - The Indonesian government has set up a National Council for Climate Change (DNPI) tasked with formulating government policies on climate change, a cabinet minister said.

"The council was established to follow up on the results of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)," Environment Minister Rachmat Witoelar said here on Friday (19/12).

The minister made the remark after attending a coordination meeting on the DNPI program on climate change at the office of the coordinating minister for people's welfare on Friday evening.

Witoelar said that the UNFCCC had just finished organizing the 14th Conference of the Parties (COP) in Poznan, Poland, on December 1-12, 2008 as a follow up to the 13th COP held in Bali in December 2007.

He said that the DNPI was a newly established council formed through Presidential Decree 46/2008. It is chaired

by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono with the chief economic minister and the coordinating minister for people's welfare as vice chairmen. The minister for environment serves as the executive chairman of the council.

Witoelar said that the tasks of the national council was to formulate national policies on climate change and coordinate activities related to climate change which include aspects of adaptation, mitigation, technological transfer and funding.

Besides, the council also has the task to formulate regulations and carbon trade mechanism and to carry out monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the climate change policies.

It also has the task to strengthen Indonesia's position in encouraging advanced countries to take more responsibilities with regard to the climate change.

According to Witoelar, without the DNPI, it was feared that Indonesia would lose many opportunities from climate change issues such as the opportunity to obtain funding for preserving its natural resources.

Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Aburizal Bakrie, Acting Chief Economic Minister Sri Mulyani, Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda and Forestry Minister MS Kaban attended the coordination meeting.(ANTARA)

RI Ready to Host World Ocean Conference

Jakarta - The secretary to coordinating minister for people's welfare, Dwisuryo Indroyono Soesilo, said here Monday (22/12) that Indonesia was ready to host the World Ocean Conference (WOC) in Manado, North Sulawesi, on May 11 to 15, 2009.

Indroyono made the statement at a meeting with representatives of foreign embassies at Borobudur Hotel about the progress report of the WOC secretariat's preparations.

"The draft Manado Ocean Declaration (MOD) has been distributed to all stakeholders worldwide. We also have

prepared the infrastructure facilities such as hotels and convention halls to accommodate the WOC participants" Indroyono said.

The infrastructure developed in Manado, he said, include five new star-rated hotels, 2 convention halls, airport expansion, road expansion, new welcome centers, and a 2x20 MW geothermal power plant.

Indroyono added that the government would cover expenses of five days of board and lodging of about 363 WOC participants from 121 countries. Each delegation, he said, should consist of a chairman and two members.

"We also provide special Garuda flights from Singapore to Manado and vice versa There are also extra flights from Manado to Jakarta from May 8 to 18, 2009," Indroyono said adding that delegates should not be worried about accommodation in Manado anymore because the government is providing it.

The WOC is an event to raise the profile of oceans as well as to increase the political commitment of countries around the world to play an important role for oceans and in climate change.

Furthermore, Indroyono said, Indonesia as host of the WOC would also launch the new multilateral partnership named Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI) on Coral Reefs, Fisheries, and Food Security. Established in 2007, this partnership represents a strong political will among its six members to preserve and manage marine biodiversity in their territory against risks which could disturb the ocean's life and , in the end, the life of man.

The CTI, he said, was considered a model of cooperation with expectations that it would take WOC spirit forward into action.

The CTI participating countries include the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Timor Leste. (ANTARA)

RI Planted 79.1 Million Trees in 2008: Minister

Depok, West Java - Indonesia planted a total of 79.1 million trees in less than one month's time during the National Movement to Plant 100 Million Trees in 2008, a minister said.

According to data up to December 23, 2008, some 79.1 million trees were planted, Forestry Minister MS Kaban said here on Wednesday (31/12) during a 500-tree planting event with noted poet WS Rendra.

To support the national tree planting movement, the forestry ministry had provided two million saplings to each province, according to the minister.

The trees were planted mainly in arid areas and idle lands, he said.

First Lady Ani Yudhoyono launched a tree planting movement for women at Ancol Ocean Park, in northern Jakarta, on December 1.

The theme of the 2008 tree planting movement was "The food resilience of family" to encourage the people to plant fruit-bearing and edible trees.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono launched the Indonesian Tree Planting Day 2008 on November 28, 2008.

First Lady Kristiani Herrawati Bambang Yudhoyono won a United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) award for her efforts in encouraging Indonesian women to plant millions of trees simultaneously across the country in 2007. (ANTARA)

Speaking to reporters here Tuesday (30/12), Laskono urged Israel to stop its military actions in the Gaza Strip and to let humanitarian aid reach innocent civilians suffering the consequences of the Israeli actions there.

According to Laksono, APA was deeply concerned about the massive bombings and bloodshed in the Gaza Strip which had taken more than 300 lives and wounded as many as 1,000 Palestinians.

"The bombing has caused serious damage to the civilian infrastructures in the Gaza Strip as the surrounding area was left without water, sanitation and electricity," he said.

The APA president also called on the international community to use any possible ways to pressure Israel to stop its violence against Palestinians and agree to a ceasefire.

"The different points of view of the conflicting parties in the Gaza Strip must be solved by dialogue or other peaceful means," Laksono added. (ANTARA)

**REGIONAL/INTERNATIONAL
ISSUES**

**Asian Parliamentary Assembly Urges
Israel to Stop Attacking Palestine**

Jakarta - Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) members urge Israel to stop attacking Palestine and call on the international community to support efforts to put an end to the Israeli actions, APA President Agung Laksono said.