

APPENDIX

Shoemakers face profit boom as holiday nears

Urip Hudiono
The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

Idul Fitri has always been a time of preparing gift baskets, baking cookies and buying new clothes — and shoes. Just stroll along an alley near the Perbanas School of Economics in Kuningan, South Jakarta, and a row of shoe stores are ready to welcome prospective customers.

For Jakartan women, finding affordable, custom-made ladies' shoes has not been difficult, but this year's Idul Fitri shopping spree could be the last opportunity for customers, as the landowner has decided not to extend their lease.

Ibu Iyah, the owner of Bill Boy, said she and other shoemakers were told by the landlord about the plan in January.

"It's a shame, because this is one of the few places where people can have custom-made shoes," she said. "It also supports the sole livelihood of many cobblers."

Some of the stores are even holding a clearance sale, slashing their prices by up to 70 percent.

"We're just emptying our stock before we close," said a store clerk.

Iyah was slightly luckier, as she has found a new store

nearby to continue her business. She said she did not want to disappoint customers who wanted to order special shoes for Idul Fitri.

"We will be open until Idul Fitri, but we will have moved by the end of the year," she said.

Unfortunately, other landowners are taking advantage of the shoemakers' plight and estimated holiday takings by increasing their leases to about Rp 10 million (US\$1,099) per year. The shoemakers typical pay about Rp 2 million to Rp 3 million in annual rent.

"The new kiosks are also smaller," Iyah said, pointing to a three-by-three meter shop across hers, which is three meters by five meters.

She is also considering a new location near Gunadharma University in Depok, south of Jakarta, "because it's close to my main customers — university students".

Iyah, who has been selling ladies' shoes and bags for 18 years, said that ahead of Idul Fitri, sales and orders usually climbed to about 50 pairs a day, compared to the 20 pairs a day for the rest of the year. She sells her shoes for Rp 100,000 to Rp 150,000.

"Business is always good around Idul Fitri. Many women's magazines also

buy or borrow my shoe collection for their Ramadhan and Idul Fitri cover spread," she said in between serving customers.

Rahmi, a regular at the store, described in detail the details of the shoes she wanted: made of green silk she had brought herself, the shoes were to have embroidery accents with a medium heel and wide sole, so she would not get tired quickly in them.

Meanwhile, Winda, a Perbanas student who was shopping at Iyah's store with friends, said she preferred to buy shoes at stores along this Kuningan alleyway because they were cheap.

"It's obviously cheaper for students like us to buy shoes here than at a boutique or a shopping mall," she said. "The quality and the designs are also comparable to what they carry."

Ninis, a bank employee who is also a regular, said she liked to shop at Iyah's store because she could get shoes tailored to fit.

"The problem for women in buying shoes is finding the right size of a pair that matches our outfit," she said, as she ordered four pairs of shoes for Idul Fitri. "Here, if I cannot find the shoes I'm looking for, I can simply have them made."

Ex-rivals SBY, Wiranto have 'small talk' at presidential office

Fabiola Desy Unidjaja
The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

Long-time comrades President Gen. (ret) Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and former presidential rival Gen. (ret) Wiranto held a brief reunion on Friday.

The two former generals met for 20 minutes at the presidential office to reminisce and chat, said Wiranto, a former commander of the Indonesian Military (TNI), in response to questions as to whether the TNI leadership issue was raised.

The issue of who is the legitimate TNI chief — incumbent TNI chief Gen. Endriartono Sutarto, who tendered his resignation during the final days of Megawati Soekarnoputri's term, or Army chief of staff Gen. Ryamizard Ryacudu — is yet to be resolved, with the House of Representatives divided over the matter.

"We were just sharing stories, as we used to be colleagues. I merely expressed

my hope that he could be a good leader who lived up to the people's aspirations," Wiranto said after the meeting.

Wiranto stressed that, although the two were rivals in the presidential race, he now had a moral obligation to support Susilo.

The two have a shared history in the armed forces and in politics.

A video footage of the 1998 May riots in Jakarta shows Gen. Wiranto as then-TNI commander appealing to a crowd to calm down. Standing behind him is Susilo, then a lieutenant general and the TNI chief of social and political affairs, and among Wiranto's close aides at the time.

The two also held Cabinet positions in 1999 under former president Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid, until Wiranto was dismissed by Gus Dur for his alleged involvement in human rights abuses during that year's referendum in East Timor.

Susilo was then named Wiranto's successor as coor-

dinating minister for political and security affairs, relinquishing his post as minister of energy.

Their paths crossed once again when the two raced against each other and three other candidates in the first direct presidential election this year: Wiranto under the Golkar Party banner after a surprise victory in the first party convention; and Susilo as the sole candidate of the new Democratic Party, which he founded.

Their paths diverged as Wiranto, along with Amien Rais and former vice president Hamzah Haz, was eliminated in the first round in July, while Susilo went on to the runoff and defeated Megawati Soekarnoputri on Sept. 20.

The two generals were observed embracing each other in greeting as Wiranto stepped into Susilo's office, where they talked at a table in front of the President's desk. Both were smiling broadly as Susilo escorted Wiranto out of the office.

House factions meet to resolve conflict

Kurniawan Hari
The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

After a week-long deadlock, the bickering factions in the House of Representatives met for the first time for a consultation meeting facilitated by House Speaker Agung Laksono on Thursday.

Agung claimed the closed-door meeting had resulted in some agreements that would contribute to a settlement to the fierce dispute between the factions. But he refused to disclose the details of the agreements, saying this could interfere with the negotiations.

"I believe there will be a complete solution in the next few days. There is already a consensus on some fundamental issues," he said after the meeting.

Among the faction leaders attending the meeting were M. Hatta of Golkar, Panda Nababan of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), Erman Suparno of the National Awakening Party (PKB), Endin AJ Soefihara of the United Development Party (PPP), Abdillah Toha of the National Mandate Party (PAN) and Irwan Prayitno of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS).

Agung said the faction leaders all wanted to settle the dispute amicably.

But some faction leaders denied that they had reached a consensus during the meeting, which they said consisted of nothing more than preliminary discussions.

"It was only a brainstorming forum that will be followed by other meetings. The most important thing was that we agreed to scrap the dichotomy between the Nationhood Coalition and the People's Coalition," Erman told *The Jakarta Post*.

Endin said that the meeting had done little as regards bringing an end to the dispute.

"Our position is clear, we have to distribute the commission chairs proportionally," he told the *Post*.

Earlier, the Nationhood Coalition had offered three chairmanship and 12 deputy chairmanship posts in the House commissions and auxiliary bodies to the rival camp.

The People's Coalition, however, demanded that the two groups sit down together and discuss the problem comprehensively, instead of simply discussing power-sharing.

Lawmakers have been locked in a stalemate following the unilateral selection of leaders of 11 commissions and five auxiliary bodies in the House. Factions affiliated to the Nationhood Coalition — Golkar, PDI-P, the Prosperous Peace Party (PDS), and the Reform Star Party (PBR) — plus the PKB, shared the posts out among themselves after legislators grouped in the People's Coalition boycotted the selection.

The People's Coalition, comprising the PPP, PAN, PKS, the Democratic Party (PD) and some smaller parties grouped in the Democratic Pioneer Star (BPD) faction, demanded the proportional distribution of leadership posts.

With their first month's salaries already having been paid, the lawmakers have yet to start on their legislative duties, despite the fact that they were inaugurated on Oct. 1.

The dispute has prompted President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to ban Cabinet ministers from attending hearings with the House. The President said that this was necessary to give the legislators a chance to settle their internal feud.

Kidnapers get away with Rp 28m

Evi Mariani
The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

Just a week after the police arrested a woman suspected of being a member of a kidnapping syndicate operating in Kelapa Gading, North Jakarta, a similar case took place in Depok, south of Jakarta.

Two students of SMP Cakra Buana private junior high school — identified as Michael, 14, and Fajar, 14 — were abducted when walking home from school on Monday.

Depok Police chief Sr. Comr. Raja Erizman said on Wednesday that the syndicate had demanded Rp 15 million (US\$1,648) ransom for each boy from the parents. The parents immediately transferred the money to the appointed bank account. However, Raja did not disclose the bank or the name of the account holder.

The parents also contacted

the police for help.

Detectives from Depok Police immediately launched a hunt for the kidnapers and patrolled several places until they received a tipoff that the kidnapers had moved to a house in Bintaro, Tangerang. When they searched the house, they did not find the children.

Michael and Fajar were dropped off at Depok Mall on Tuesday afternoon after the kidnapers received the ransom. The boys immediately rushed home.

“We are still hunting down the kidnapers. We have yet to get any information from the victims. We haven’t questioned them since they are still traumatized,” Raja said.

The Depok case was the third reported kidnapping case in Greater Jakarta this week.

Spokesman of the Jakarta Police, which oversees the neighboring cities of Tangerang, Bekasi and Depok,

Sr. Comr. Tjiptono warned parents to remind their children not to speak to strangers.

“Looking at the recent modus operandi, it is important for the police to remind parents to keep telling their children not to trust strangers,” he said.

In the case of Michael and Fajar, they were approached by several unidentified men, who said that they were sent by the boys’ parents to bring them home. The boys then agreed to get into the kidnapers’ car.

Tjiptono also said that the syndicate was likely targeting schools for families from the middle and high-income bracket.

“Based on the preliminary investigation, we conclude that the kidnapers have been targeting children from well-off families,” he said.

The previous case took place on Oct. 25 in Kelapa Gading when Johanes, 13, and

Nicholas, 13, both students of SMP Jubilee private junior high school, were abducted after school by unidentified men at two separate locations.

The kidnapers demanded the boys’ parents each pay Rp 20 million in ransom. Soon after they received the money, the boys were returned safely to their parents.

One of the alleged syndicate members, Lydia, 40, was arrested when collecting the ransom money through an automated teller machine (ATM) of Bank Central Asia in Taman Sari, West Jakarta.

A Don Bosco junior high school student in Pulomas, East Jakarta, was also kidnapped in late September. The parents sent Rp 20 million in ransom and the boy was returned to them unharmed.

Police did not say whether they had concluded that all the kidnapping cases were committed by the same syndicate.

Susilo greets returning migrant workers

Fadli and Puji Santoso
The Jakarta Post/Tanjung Pinang/Dumai

In a show of sympathy, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono greeted on Wednesday undocumented migrant workers who had returned to the country from Malaysia via major entry points in Riau and neighboring Riau Islands provinces.

Local officials ushered the president upon his arrival to a hall in a Tanjung Pinang center to meet some 200 migrant workers who had been waiting for him.

"To our labor heroes returning from Malaysia, welcome back. I am here to see for myself whether you faced any problems on your way home," the President told the workers.

Susilo said the migrant workers deserved the government's appreciation for helping to curb unemployment and for their struggle to make a living in a foreign country.

"Migrant workers have helped the government, as you have reduced the number of open unemployment, which currently stands at 10.3 million," Susilo said.

With an estimated 700,000

workers repatriating from Malaysia, Susilo said his administration would have to tackle a more serious unemployment problem.

Susilo led a high-powered delegation to draw up repatriation management plans comprising Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Widodo A.S., Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Alwi Shihab, Minister of Social Services Bachtiar Chamsyah, Minister of Home Affairs M. Ma'ruf, Minister of Transportation Hatta Radjasa, Minister of Health Siti Fadila Supari, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hassan Wirayuda, National Police Chief Da'i Bachtiar and Cabinet Secretary Sudi Silalahi.

The mass repatriation follows Malaysia's decision to provide amnesty to illegal workers in view of the approaching Idul Fitri holiday, if they left by Nov. 14.

However, only some 9,000 of 400,000 Indonesian illegal workers have responded to the amnesty offer, raising concerns among the two neighboring governments.

The Riau Islands has already received 4,018 returning workers.

While the government is seeking measures to tackle unemployment issues that would ensue from the repatriation, including a resettlement program, the president said Minister of Manpower and Transmigration Fahmi Idris, who is now in Kuala Lumpur, would ask Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to accept the workers back when they had obtained proper documents.

In Dumai, a number of arriving migrant workers spoke to Susilo about the discriminatory treatment and abuse they had endured from their Malaysian employers regarding leave and wages.

Sahrosa of Jambi said many Malaysian employers paid Indonesian migrant workers much less than those from the Philippines and other countries.

"They paid Filipino workers up to 2,000 ringgit a month, but only gave us one fifth of that amount," said the 26-year-old woman.

Susilo promised to ask Kuala Lumpur to improve labor conditions on behalf of the interests of Indonesian workers there.

NGOs want civilian role to end war in Aceh

Muninggar Sri Saraswati
and Fabiola Desy Unidjaja
The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

The government must abandon its security approach and open dialog with civilian figures to settle the Aceh conflict once and for all, a discussion has concluded.

A discussion held by non-governmental organizations under the Aceh Working Group (AWG) concluded on Tuesday that dialog involving civilian Acehnese would stop years of violence in the province.

"(The government) must change their mind-set. It has said that the operations in Aceh are aimed at winning the hearts and minds of the Acehnese people. They must not turn into merely a hunt for members of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM)," said Usman Hamid, chairman of the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras) human rights group.

Usman said women, religious leaders, university students and the public in Aceh must be invited because of their capabilities and not because of their close ties with the government.

He also criticized the government for maintaining a large number of troops in the restive province despite its claim that GAM's strength had been reduced significantly.

Around 14,000 troops are deployed in Aceh, where GAM separatists have been fighting for independence for the resource-rich province.

Usman said the government must facilitate "a well-formulated dialog among civilian elements representing Aceh" in a bid to grasp the true aspirations of the Acehnese.

Acehnese legislator Farhan Hamid of the National Mandate Party faction and Zoemrotin K. Susilo of the National

Rights (Komnas HAM) agreed that the government should conduct dialog with civilians in Aceh.

"The government must understand the expectations of Acehnese," said Farhan, adding that it must also guarantee their security.

He suggested that a national commission consisting of independent figures be established to help settle the conflict.

"The commission could gather input from the Acehnese or hold talks with GAM if necessary, but it must not be placed under any ministry ... we're afraid it would not perform well, as the government has many problems to face," Hamid said.

An ulema told a government delegation led by Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Widodo Adi Sucipto last week to open dialog with the Acehnese to resolve the conflict, which has killed more than 15,000 people since GAM began its struggle for independence in 1976.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who took his oath of office on Oct. 20, has pledged to settle the conflict in Aceh during the first 100 days of his government.

Widodo said on Tuesday that the government was considering three options for Aceh.

"We may extend the status of civil emergency, extend it in select regencies, or lift the status but maintain security and law enforcement operations," he said.

Speaking to reporters after accompanying President Susilo in a meeting at Merdeka Palace, Widodo said the final decision would be announced on Nov. 18.

"The potential for threat remain high in the province with the presence of the separatist movement ... we are going to evaluate the situation further," Widodo said.

Thai tragedy has nothing to do with religion: NU

Tiarma Siboro
The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) chairman Hasyim Muzadi met Thailand's Ambassador to Indonesia, Atchrrara Ceriputra, on Tuesday to discuss last week's tragedy in her country that resulted in the deaths of 85 Muslim rioters, and later said the bloodshed had nothing to do with religious sentiment.

Hasyim made the statement following reports that a group of Islamists in Surakarta, Central Java, were actively searching out and trying to harass non-Muslim Thai citizens to get revenge for the deaths of fellow Muslims in southern Thailand.

Ceriputra, however, said the harassment of Thai expatriates was just a rumor and that her embassy had not yet received any reports of such incidents.

After a closed door meeting with Ceriputra at the NU headquarters in Kramat Raya, Central Jakarta, Hasyim

urged Indonesian Muslims not to be narrow-minded in their responses to the tragedy and asked them to help Thailand find a solution to the problem.

The 85 deaths took place on Oct. 25 after a protest by some 3,000 demonstrators from the Muslim south of predominantly Buddhist Thailand. At least 1,300 were rounded up and packed into four military trucks. Six of the 85 dead were killed by gunshot wounds in the rowdy protest, while the rest suffocated in the back of the trucks.

"The ambassador told me that the Thai government had never viewed the unarmed protesters as being part of a separatist group. However, she admitted that violence had frequently erupted there," he added.

The leader of the 40 million-strong NU said Ceriputra had assured him that her government would be better prepared to handle similar demonstrations in the future.

"Indeed, the Thailand case shows us that all countries in

Southeast Asia must protect minority groups," Hasyim said during a press conference with Ceriputra after the meeting.

He said that in an effort to increase religious brotherhood among Thais and Indonesians, the NU would invite Thai Muslim and Buddhist leaders to its national leadership congress to be held from Nov. 29 to Dec. 3 in Surakarta.

The guests would be given a chance during the upcoming forum to explain the religious situation in Thailand, Hasyim added.

"God willing, the Thai religious leaders will be able to explain the tragedy to our guests from the International Conference of Islamic Scholars," Hasyim said.

Ceriputra said the Oct. 25 tragedy in Tak Bai district, Narathiwat province, followed incidents that started earlier this year after firearms were stolen from the a military base in the province.

After that, there were 325

cases of arson, 77 bombing attempts, 22 attacks on government facilities and 477 assaults, including drive-by shootings of citizens," said a statement released by the Thai embassy.

It said that up to Oct. 21, the death toll from the incidents stood at 264 people, with 397 people injured.

The Thai tragedy, blamed on a military crackdown, drew widespread condemnation from other countries, including Indonesia.

The Thai embassy has issued a warning to its approximately 500,000 citizens in Indonesia to be on alert against possible harassment of them by hard-line groups.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has asked the police to provide additional protection for Thai nationals and to take resolute action against any Indonesians threatening them in connection with the recent bloodshed in Thailand.

Ulema calls for TNI-GAM dialog

Nani Afrida
The Jakarta Post/Banda Aceh

With the six-month state of civil emergency in Aceh nearing an end, leading ulemas here suggested on Monday that the new government revive a dialog with Free Aceh Movement (GAM) rebels to settle decades of conflict there.

Chairman of the ulemas council of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, Muslim Ibrahim, told a high-powered government delegation that people were desperate for a normal life like their counterparts in the rest of the nation.

Muslim said the conflict in the province of 4.2 million people could not be solved through the use of arms, but deliberation and consensus, involving all groups that wish to see peace prevail in Aceh.

"The government cannot seek a conflict settlement alone, but President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono needs to form a special team, which he leads himself and involves as much public participation as possible without prejudice," Muslim said.

His advice came amid rumors that Susilo's administration was initiating an informal meeting with GAM leaders in exile in Malaysia. Minister of Justice and Human Rights Hamid Awaluddin, however, denied the reports.

Those who were in Aceh for the meetings included Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Widodo AS, Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Alwi Shihab, Minister of Social Services Bachtiar Chamsyah, Minister of Home Affairs M. Ma'aruf, Minister of Finance Yusuf Anwar, Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Purnomo Yusgiantoro, National Police Chief Gen. Da'i Bachtiar and Attorney General Abdul Rahman Saleh.

The Cabinet members visited Aceh to get input from local officials and leaders about the implementation of the state of civil emergency, which was imposed on May 19

to replace martial law.

The government is evaluating the emergency status.

Contrary to Muslim's suggestion, Widodo said the operation to crush the rebels should continue.

"We have two agendas to push in order to solve the Aceh problem, namely enforcement of the special autonomy status for the province and to finish off the separatists," Widodo said after a three-hour, closed-door meeting with the civil emergency administration in Aceh.

He said the operation to stamp out rebellion would continue to restore security and order and put an end to the conflict. The target of the operation would include the capture of GAM leaders.

"Although generally the security condition in Aceh has improved, armed rebels are still present and their leaders remain at large," Widodo said.

Widodo, however, promised to convey all the input from the Acehnese, including the ulemas, to the president before deciding whether to extend or discontinue the state of civil emergency in the province.

The government and GAM had started unprecedented peace talks with mediation by the Swiss-based Henri Dunant Centre during the tenure of President Abdurrahman Wahid. A semblance of peace returned to Aceh for several months after the two sides signed the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in December 2002.

The peace agreement broke down in May 2003, prompting then president Megawati Soekarnoputri to declare martial law.

Separately, Aceh anticorruption activist Akhiruddin called on the government during the dialog to strictly uphold the law, particularly with officials that were involved in corruption.

"The new administration should win the trust of the people. A clean government would boost people's confidence in the government," he said.

Ticket hunting season in full swing

Abdul Khalik
The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

Joko Saputro received the same answer at ticket counters of airlines, trains and buses over the past three weeks: "Sorry, all tickets for Nov. 11 and Nov. 12 are already sold out".

The 40-year-old security guard at a private bank in South Jakarta had thought of giving up his plan to celebrate the Idul Fitri holidays, which are expected to fall on Nov. 14 and Nov. 15, in his hometown Semarang with his wife and four children.

As his office has given only two days off before the holiday, he decided to take the fastest mode of transportation available so the family can arrive in Semarang on time to enjoy the five days holiday.

"I almost gave up ... the only choice would be to go to Semarang after Idul Fitri," Joko told *The Jakarta Post* on Monday.

But a neighbor came to the rescue, and offered Joko his car for rent for Rp 300,000 (US\$33) a day.

"It was like a blessing. I will rent the car for five days and drive myself. I'm quite happy although I know that it will be very tiring for us."

For most Jakartan migrants, going home to celebrate Idul Fitri with the extended family, or *mudik*, is a must because, as Joko put it, "what we have done and saved in a year is meaningful only when we can share it with relatives and neighbors in our hometown".

The authorities have predicted that around 2.11 million Jakartans, a 10 percent

increase from last year, will go back to their respective hometowns, in particular to Central Java and East Java.

The competition to get tickets home has started to heat up because most of them want to leave Jakarta during the same period: A week or at least few days before the big day.

National flag carrier PT Garuda Indonesia spokesman Pujobroto revealed that all seats had been fully booked for flights between Nov. 10 to Nov. 14 since the end of last month.

"Although we have provided extra flights with 62,000 seats, all seats in our 200 flights are fully booked during the peak period. We will add flights until late at night during that period if the demand is still high," he told the *Post*.

He said that the busiest

routes are from Jakarta heading to Denpasar, Surabaya, Surakarta, Semarang, Yogyakarta and Medan.

It is predicted that around 481,000 people will use planes, or up 25 percent from the same period last year.

Gambir railway station master Besar Susmiarso confirmed that holidaymakers sought train tickets starting on Nov. 5, with the highest demand for Nov. 12.

"Tickets for Nov. 9 until Nov. 12 are all sold out. In anticipation of the hike in passengers we have provided additional train cars ahead of Idul Fitri," he said.

He added that around 534,000 people were expected to use trains to get to their hometowns in West Java, Central Java and East Java ahead of Idul Fitri.

Govt's antidiscrimination commitment questioned

Muninggar Sri Saraswati
The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

For Chinese-Indonesians, albeit a minority, the government of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's pledge to fight discrimination is not convincing.

During a discussion held by the Chinese-Indonesian Association (INTI) on Saturday, a number of participants recalled the controversial remarks made by Vice President Jusuf Kalla on the government's plan to help native Indonesians in the economic sector.

"Honestly, we're cautious about JK's statement that the government will introduce a policy to help small-scale enterprise businesses, which is likely to sideline us," a businessman, Budy, said, referring to Kalla by his initials.

Kalla was a renowned businessman from South Sulawesi.

Another participant, Sunarti, said Chinese-Indonesians were not "100 percent sure" the president could take firm decisions regarding all forms of discrimination following his failure to meet his promise to announce his Cabinet lineup on Oct. 20.

"Some say he (Susilo) is indecisive. We're afraid he could not do anything to protect the rights of minority groups like us here," she said.

Susilo unveiled his United Indonesian Cabinet on Oct. 21, which many have seen more as a compromise.

Under founding president Sukarno, Indonesia once adopted an economic system which protected indigenous

entrepreneurs called *Politik Benteng* (Fort Politics). But when his successor Soeharto took office, Chinese-Indonesian businesspeople ruled the roost.

Chinese-Indonesians account for about 4 percent of the country's population of 215 million.

Melly G. Tan, a Chinese-Indonesian sociologist, confirmed the anxiety among the non-indigenous community.

"There is distrust among Chinese-Indonesians, that's the major challenge the new government has to deal with," she said.

Political expert J. Kristiadi of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) acknowledged concern about discrimination which remains unabated.

"Most Chinese-Indonesians are still traumatized by state-endorsed discrimination which has been in place for years," he said.

Kristiadi suggested that Susilo be firm in protecting the rights of all citizens, including minority groups, in a bid to win popular support.

"Susilo could start with revocation of all regulations deemed discriminatory against the minority groups," Kristiadi said. He pointed at the citizenship certificate required in obtaining immigration documents for Chinese-Indonesians called SBKRI, which remains effective in practice despite the central government's decision to scrap it.

Economist Faisal Basri said Chinese-Indonesians could press the government and the House of Representatives to live up to their expectations.

"They are now sitting on their chairs thanks to your votes. Don't be afraid to push them to end discrimination against you," he suggested.

Kristiadi also asked Chinese-Indonesians not to be easily satisfied by the previous governments which let them celebrate Chinese New Year and declare it a national holiday.

"You still have to fight against other forms of discrimination which infringe on your rights as citizens," he said.

Resume military ties with U.S.: Expert

M. Taufiqurrahman
The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

The reelection of President George W. Bush is expected to offer a greater opportunity for the resumption of Indonesian military ties with the United States and to clear the way for more aid to help in the domestic fight against terrorism.

Bara Hasibuan, a former congressional fellow and the National Mandate Party (PAN)'s director of international relations, said that for the sake of his global campaign against terror, President Bush would persuade the U.S. Congress to lift its embargo on the Indonesian Military.

"The Bush administration considers Southeast Asia as a breeding ground for terrorism and Indonesia will continue to be its partner in fighting terrorism," Bara told a discussion here on Friday.

According to Bara, Bush had in fact sought to end the military embargo on Indonesia after he took power for his first four-year term.

Bara said that the new Bush administration would also keep disbursing aid to the Indonesian government to help it with the antiterror drive. "But the Indonesian government must be proactive in reaching out for it and leave its passive approach behind," he added.

The United States imposed the embargo on the Indonesian Military (TNI) following widespread allegations that gross human rights abuses took place when East Timor voted for independence from Indonesia in 1999.

The arms embargo was exacerbated by the killing of two American teachers in Timika, Papua province, in August 2002. The U.S. had alleged that there were rogue elements in the powerful TNI that played a role in the ambush.

New Indonesian Minister of Defense Juwono Sudarsono plans to visit the U.S. to step up the lobbying of the U.S. government so as to have the arms embargo lifted and military ties between the two countries improved.

Analysts have expressed skepticism that the visit would bear fruit as the TNI has steadfastly refused to acknowledge its poor human rights record.

In the same discussion, hosted by the Indonesian Survey Institute, political communications expert Effendi Gazali, who is familiar with U.S. politics, said the overwhelming vote for Bush showed that he had won unprecedented support for his war against terrorism.

He said that Bush would no longer care so much about his image as he would be barred from contesting another term in 2008.

"The U.S. will portray a fiercer look to the outside world," he claimed.

Ba'asyir dismisses bombing charges as 'joke'

Sari P. Setiogi
The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

The elderly Muslim cleric who is on trial for the bombings in Bali and at the JW Marriott Hotel in Jakarta, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, mocked the court on Thursday and challenged it to pile on the charges.

Ba'asyir said in his defense plea that the charges addressed to him was a mere joke, made only to satisfy the United States.

"To add to the thrill, why not add the bombing (in front of) the General Election Commission (July 26), the Kuningan bombing (in September) and the blast (in front of) the Indonesian Embassy in Paris (Oct. 8) to my charges," Ba'asyir said, referring to a number of bombings this year.

He faces criminal charges for the bombings in Bali in 2002 which claimed 202 lives, for which the maximum penalty is life, and of violating the anti terrorism law for the U.S.-chain JW Marriott hotel bombing in Jakarta in 2003 which killed 12 people.

Earlier the Constitutional Court ruled that the anti terrorism law which was passed early last year and for which

the maximum penalty is death, could not apply retroactively.

"I was accused for being involved with the Marriott bombing while I had been under detention for about a year. I didn't even know that Marriott was a name of a hotel," the 66-year-old cleric said reading his statement.

"Perhaps the police and the prosecutors believe I could go in and out of prison magically ... This is really a joke," he said.

He reiterated claims that his trial was part of a U.S. scenario to pressure on Muslims. Referring to President George W. Bush, who has just been re-elected, he said, "He made things up, as if it was a fight against terrorism. Bush's definition of a terrorist is every Muslim who tries to establish Islamic law."

Ba'asyir is also accused for attending a graduation ceremony of an Islamic militia training in Mindanao, the Philippines, in April 2000, an incident which the prosecution relates to his involvement in the bombings.

Graduates of the training included Malaysian nationals Azahari and Noordin M. Top, leading fugitives wanted for several bombing cases in

Indonesia, including the latest, Sept. 9 blast in front of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta which claimed 10 lives. The training is said to be held by the United Nations-listed terrorist organization Jemaah Islamiyah, which Ba'asyir is accused of leading.

"I was busy preparing the Congress of Majelis Mujahiddin Indonesia (MMI) in Yogyakarta at that time," said Ba'asyir of the organization which he chairs.

His lawyer Muhammad Assegaff said that the prosecutor "had connected several entirely unrelated events." Also citing the interest of the U.S. and its allies including Australia in the war on terrorism, Assegaff questioned why his client was prosecuted for the Bali bombing only two years after the event.

After the trial, Ba'asyir asked for a suspended detention to celebrate the coming Idul Fitri with his family at home. The judges said they would consider the request.

Thursday trial's was attended by dozens of Ba'asyir's supporters, his wife and two sons.

The trial was adjourned until Nov. 11 to hear the prosecutor's response to the defense statement.