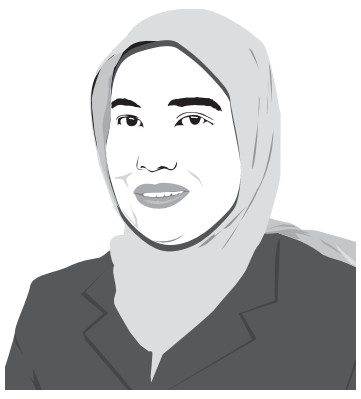
Opportunities and challenges in transition to New and Renewable Energy (Part 1)



Dina Nurul Fitria
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Energy, as we all know, is the source of life. Life is work and every work requires energy. Energy is the ability to perform work which can be transferred in the form of heat, light, mechanical, chemical, electrical, gravitational, and nuclear. Energy is closely related to state policy, especially in terms of natural resources that can be used as source of energy. Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution covers the entire orientation of the provision, development, exploitation, utilization, and allocation of energy resources. The ultimate aim is, as emphasized by Article 1(25) of Law 30/2007 on energy, to achieve national energy independence and security.

Indonesia is a country rich in energy resources, both renewable and especially non-renewable resources. Even though Indonesia is not blessed with abundant fossil fuels reserves and is not an oil- or gas-producing country, its energy mix is dominated by fossil fuels (oil, gas and coal). The share of New and Renewable Energy (EBT) in its energy mix has never been in the double-digit territory. Currently, it only accounts for 5 percent and is projected to reach 23 percent in 2025 and 31 percent in 2050 according to the National General Energy Planning (RUEN). Considering the pace and dynamics, the target will be difficult to achieve because the development of EBT is constrained by economic factors and the lack of political will from stakeholders.

Indonesia has passed several regulations on the development of its energy sector, among others:

- Law 22/2001 on petroleum and natural gas;
- Law 30/2007 on energy;
- Law 4/2009 on mining;
- Law 30/2009 on electricity; and
- Law 21/2014 on geothermal.

Because Indonesia does not recognize the "umbrella act" concept, the position of Law 30/2007 does not cover the orientation of energy development in an integrated and long-term manner. However, integrated and long-term planning is not unheard of.

In 2005, the government established the National Energy Coordinating Agency (Bakoren) which crafted the 2005-2025 National Energy Blueprint (BP-PEN) which was later stipulated in Presidential Regulation (Perpres) 5/2006 on National Energy Policy (KEN). After the issuance of the Energy Law, the government revoked Perpres 5/2006 and replace it with Government Regulation (PP) 79/2014 on National Energy Policy which set the direction of national energy management until 2050. It stipulates the composition of EBT to be at least 23 percent in 2025 and 31 percent in 2050. The share of petroleum, coal and natural gas are to be reduced to below 25 percent, 30 percent and 22 percent in 2025; and 20 percent, 25 percent and 24 percent, respectively, in 2050.

To implement this regulation at the national level, the president issued Perpres 22/2017 on General Planning for National Energy (RUEN) which must be followed up by the regions by issuing General Planning for Regional Energy (RUED).

Issues in energy market

A measure of a nation's development is its productive energy consumption as indicated by the elasticity index and energy intensity. In nominal terms, Indonesia's per capita energy consumption is still relatively low, only 0.8 million tons of oil equivalent (Mtoe), far below Singapore (13.9 Mtoe), Malaysia (3 Mtoe), China (2.2 Mtoe), and Thailand (1.8 Mtoe). Although low, the consumption is considered wasteful because the energy elasticity is 1.63 and the energy intensity 0.26 barrel of oil equivalent per million (BOE) per million Rupiah. This means that to create 1 percent of economic growth, it takes 1.63 percent of energy consumption and to produce Rp1 million worth of GDP, it takes 0.26 BOE. Energy consumption is considered efficient and productive if the energy elasticity is below 1 and the energy intensity is 164 Toe/million US dollar.

Population and economic growth will increase energy consumption. Indonesia's current population is around 260 million people and is projected to grow to 317 million people by 2045. The average increase in population is 13 percent per year while the economic growth averages 5 percent per annum. Thus, the demand for energy will increase, but not matched by the supply side. As a result, Indonesia must obtain the energy it needs through imports, which keep increasing by the year.

Since 2004, Indonesia has been a net oil importer. The current consumption of oil is 1.6 million barrels per day (bpd), while the production is only 800,000 bpd. Even that must be shared with the contractors. Every day Indonesia imports more than 1 million bpd of crude and refined petroleum products. Gas production is still in surplus, but half of it is tied to long-term export contracts. Same with coal, where two-thirds of production is exported overseas.

The short-term orientation of energy resource management as a forex-earning commodity has scuppered Indonesia's opportunity to become an energy independent country. It is estimated that Indonesia will not only be a net importer of oil, but of energy by 2027. RUEN states that Indonesia's oil imports will be four times higher in 2025 and seven times higher in 2050 compared to total domestic production. Indonesia's 2016-2035 Natural Gas Balance estimates that, as a result of demand-supply imbalance, gas imports would begin in 2019.

By relying on imports, Indonesia's energy supply is dependent on other countries, which means that it will be affected by turmoil in producing countries. Prices will be completely dictated by the market and government intervention has become increasingly unacceptable according to the law of supply and demand. Import plans cannot be separated from dependence on fossil energy in the energy mix. Around 95 percent of the energy mix is dominated by fossil fuels, with oil and gas accounting for 69 percent. EBT development exists only on paper and it is going nowhere due to the lack of political will and funding.

Even though PP 79/2014 has created a new paradigm that energy management is no longer a revenue-earning export commodity but rather a development capital, the general mindset of stakeholders remains the same. The development of EBT is hampered by economic factors and the government has subjected itself to the market force law. In economic calculations, EBT investment has yet to make economic sense and hence the investors are not interested in it.

Without investment, EBT cannot be produced on an industrial scale. The government has limited funds to promote investment in renewable energy development through fiscal incentives because all state revenues from the energy sector are swallowed up by the state budget and spent up in one fiscal year. In fact, the world's best practice for energy management is that fossil fuels must subsidize EBT from the funds set aside as a depletion premium.

The initiative to form a petroleum fund has yet to materialize because there is no legal framework. Coupled with governance problems that do not reflect state control, Indonesia's energy management is not supportive of its endeavor to achieve energy sovereignty, independence and resilience. Sovereignty is related to upstream control, namely the extent to which a sovereign state make policies (*beleid*), regulates (*regelendaad*), administer (*bestuursdaad*), manages (*beheersdaad*), and oversee (*toezichtoudendaad*) its energy sector as a coherent action. Energy independence concerns the downstream side, namely the ability of the state to meet its own needs (self-sufficient) from its own energy resources.

Resilience is related to the ability to meet one's own energy needs, either from domestic or foreign sources. Many countries do not have energy resources but have energy security, for example, Singapore. There are also many countries that have energy resources but lack energy security, like Indonesia. Indonesia does not have government-controlled strategic petroleum reserve. The only thing we have is Pertamina's operational reserve to meet consumption needs for 23 days.

"State Budget in Demise" is Only a Figment of the Imagination

The state budget will crumble. This common yet terrifying statement was often heard last August. It was voiced by the ministers – concurrently and identically.

"State budget in demise" is orchestrated to justify increasing the price of Pertalite and diesel, effective September 3, 2022.

The "demise" was proclaimed because the fuel subsidy (which was then corrected to energy subsidy) is enormous, up to IDR 502 trillion. They said: No country can bear this.

So, how is the realization now? Has the state budget crumbled?

According to data from the Finance Ministry, the APBN realization in August 2022 enjoyed a IDR 107.4 trillion surplus; by the end of September 2022, a surplus of IDR 60.8 trillion was still recorded. It means that the state budget is well. It is healthy. It is not in demise.

Meanwhile, the realization of fuel and LPG subsidies is still very low, much lower than what was "propagandized". The fuel and LPG subsidy realization as of August 2022 only totaled IDR 71.21 trillion, or 47.67 percent of the fuel and LPG subsidy budget of IDR 149.37 trillion (not including fuel compensation funds). This consists of fuel subsidies of IDR 14.58 trillion and LPG of IDR 134.79 trillion.

As for electricity subsidies, they were only realized at 51.85 percent of the budget, as of August 2022.

Thus, the realization of fuel, LPG and electricity subsidies – or energy subsidies – is only 48.86 percent of the budget. Remarkably low. To be exact, the budgeted subsidies are unexpectedly larger than needed. Does this signify that to increase fuel prices, the budget swelled? Or was it blown up?

So, how is it possible that the state budget will "collapse"?

As of the end of September 2022, data confirms that the state budget is faring well.

Fuel and LPG subsidy realization as of September 2022 was only 58.9 percent of the budget. It means that the state budget is fine; it will not collapse. Meanwhile, the realization of electricity subsidies by September 2022 was remarkably small: only 60.15 percent of the budget.

So, overall, the energy subsidy realization – fuel, LPG and electricity – as of September 2022 only reached IDR 123.8 trillion, remarkably smaller than the IDR 208.93 trillion budget, at only 59.25 percent. Let alone if compared to the "brainwashed" figure of IDR 502 trillion. Won't it be even lower?

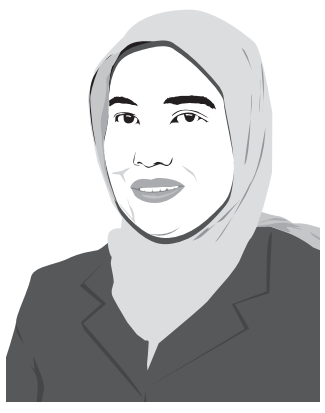
Hence, the "state budget in demise" is only a figment of the imagination? Which can be translated as false news.

The first reason is that the state budget as of September 2022 was vigorous, proven by an IDR 60.8 trillion surplus. Second, the energy subsidies have only reached 59.25 percent of the budget, which is still very low.

So is it not false to say that the "state budget in demise" is only a figment of the imagination?

Anthony Budiawan
Managing Director of PEPS (Political Economy and Policy Studies)

Opportunities and challenges in transition to New and Renewable Energy (Part 2)



By Dina Nurul Fitria
Head of Agribusiness Program at Universitas Trilogi

Concerted, cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary efforts must be made if we are to realize energy sovereignty, independence, and security – involving various disciplines from engineering, economics, politics, law, social, to the environment.

A technical approach is also needed to observe the development of technological exploration and exploitation in order to increase energy production and conservation, as well as to measure the supply of energy obtained through technological innovation from various sources, both fossil fuels (unconventional oil and gas, coal mine methane, etc.) as well as new and renewable energy (EBT) such as nuclear, solar, hydropower, tidal energy, wind and geothermal. An economic approach is needed to calculate the commercial and economic aspects, because energy production is related to revenue while energy consumption is related to reasonable price point acceptable to both consumers and producers.

A political approach is needed to gauge the likelihood that it will be formulated as a public policy championed by policy makers (the executive and legislative branches) and public acceptance. The legal approach must be considered because the management of national energy is related to the mandate of 1945 Constitution, particularly Article 33. Energy governance must not be left to the free market while disregarding the purpose of the state as mandated by the constitution. Social and environmental approaches should be used to calculate the social risks of energy management and the environmental risks of energy exploitation.

Effort to capitalize on globalization in the new era of Industry 4.0 must also be made. In the context of global economy characterized by advanced industries and services with high technology and low production costs due to cheap energy, Indonesia must achieve a positive balance of trade with its trading partners.

Value-added, export-oriented industries in the agricultural sector (including marine and forestry) and mining and mineral products that rely on local ingenuity, creativity and innovation must be encouraged.

Challenges and opportunities

The challenges facing global energy prices, especially the fluctuating non-oil and gas products (mineral and coal), are mainly influenced by the performance of the Chinese economy, as well as the domination of by giant fossil fuel companies, especially from China which account for more than 50% of global production, leading to an oversupply.

Thus, Indonesia urgently needs a paradigm of economic growth that relies on the use of environmentally friendly energy and takes advantage of carbon emission reduction, in order to spur purchasing power and household consumption to increase spending and encourage increased investment in export-oriented industries as well as oil and gas and non-oil and gas import substitution to increase revenue.

Indonesia must also pursue economic structure transformation aimed at achieving high economic growth, equitable development and income, unemployment and poverty reduction and accommodative fiscal policies.

Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution stipulates the entire orientation of the provision, development, exploitation, utilization, and allocation of energy resources. The aim is, as emphasized by Article 1 (25) of Law 30/2007 on Energy, to achieve national energy independence and security.

The oil and gas is a high-risk industry, especially in financial risk (sunk cost) if the exploration to find new oil and gas fields fails. The risk of failure can occur to any oil/gas company anywhere, including Pertamina. Therefore, the state has so far decided not to take this risk, so that it continues to adopt production/profit sharing scheme—where all risks are borne by the oil company (contractor).

Indonesia's energy structure is still dominated by fossil fuels, while energy efficiency is still low. This calls for efforts to reduce energy prices to ensure its affordability. Energy distribution also needs to be improved in order to increase the ratio of electrification and ensure fair access (equity).

Energy infrastructure, which includes oil and gas infrastructure, discovery of new oil and gas reserves, as well as the development of new and renewable energy must involves the governments of resource-rich regions, requiring them to allocate or use their share of oil and gas production to develop energy infrastructure.

The share of EBT in the energy mix has never reached double digits. Currently, it only contributes 5 percent and is projected to reach 23 percent in 2025 and 31 percent in 2050 according to the National General Energy Planning (RUEN). Considering the pace and dynamics, the target will be difficult to achieve because the development of EBT is constrained by economic factors and the lack of political will.

The bureaucratic apparatus in both central government and regional administrations have not been supported by human resources who understand investment in the energy sector, especially in the process of drafting and negotiating contracts that may potentially yield no benefit for the state.

The cost recovery mechanism is corrected with the gross split mechanism, which is simpler compared to cost recovery. Oil fields, dispersed in different locations, may have different splits, with business risks accounted into the determination of incentives to prevent stranded reserve. However, the gross split mechanism has not been optimal in its implementation.

Indonesia's energy mix is still dominated by coal, not yet focused on the development of EBT. This is caused by constraint in finances from local banks with an internal rate of return (IRR) above 6 percent, which ideally should be below that. However, the government has attracted investment in the energy sector to obtain export credits below 5 percent from foreign banks.

The Constitutional Court stated that the definition of "state control" in Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution override the concept of ownership in civil law and the roles of government as a regulator, facilitator and operator. In the concept of public law, state control means that people's sovereignty serves as the basis for state control.

The achieve energy security and sustainability in the future, Indonesia needs to establish a Petroleum/Oil and Gas Fund with transparent and accountable planning and monitoring. Indonesia has 3 percent of the world's proven reserves but only 43 percent can be exploited due to technological constraint; and 1.5 percent of global gas reserves. However, the reserve ratio is low. It can take between 15-20 years for a newly-found block to start producing oil. While domestic oil prices are almost the same as the global average, our production cost is more expensive time-wise. Additionally, nuclear energy potential should be developed, despite on a small scale.

Kei Islands: Vulnerability of Traditional Fishermen and Outermost Islands

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The Kei Islands consist of Kei Kecil (Nuhu Roa), Kei Besar (Nuhu Yuut), Tanimbar Kei, Tayando and Kut. Nuhu Yuut is one of Indonesia's outermost islands, actually bordering Australia (specified in the attachment to Presidential Decree No. 6/2017 on the Designation of Outermost Small Islands). Kei and Tual islands, whose leading sectors are tourism and fisheries, boast stunning tourist attractions. Yet, two main problems remain on Kei Island: the waste, including marine debris that has not been properly handled, and the empowerment of human resources for tourism and fisheries, especially concerning traditional fishermen.

This classic waste problem occurs not only on the Kei Islands but also in other regions, such as Ujung Kulon, Pandeglang in Banten Regency, Pasir Panjang Beach in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara and Bunaken in Manado, North Sulawesi. When waste is not managed properly, it will disappoint and dissuade tourists from visiting. I have personally witnessed how both visitors and local residents still ignorantly throw trash on the beach in Kei Kecil, and trash cans are nowhere to be seen. Let us take Ohoidertawun and Ngurbloat Beach as an example. A lot of plastic waste and seaweed can be seen on the beach, and visitors carelessly throw plastic waste. A waste management model as mandated by Waste Management Law No. 18/2008 and Government Regulation (PP) No. 27/2020 on Specific Waste Management has apparently not been sustainably implemented. This should in fact be done by involving the community and gaining support from the local government and businesses to manage waste, starting from waste collection and treatment to disposal. These processes should run parallel to regulation strengthening and waste management. In fact, good waste management can help the government achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which have become the state's commitments, including the responsibility for consumption and production (SDGs 12). Excessive consumption will result in excessive waste. Excessive marine debris and plastic waste, in particular, can detrimentally affect the marine ecosystem (SDGs 14).

Another pressing problem on Kei Island is the empowerment of human resources, which is still insufficient. A small island such as Kei is extremely vulnerable to social, economic and environmental changes that will impact community livelihoods and local food security. A unique highlight on Kei Island is the people, particularly women, still rely on cassava as an ingredient for their daily dish, called *embal*. The *embal*-making process is quite astonishing as *embal* is naturally inedible or poisonous. However, with simple methods, *embal* can be transformed into edible cassava flour ready to be processed into snacks or food. The processes include cleaning and grating the cassava. After that, it is put in a sack and pressed with wood stacked with a large stone. The toxic water from the cassava will be excreted, meaning the remaining material is ready to be turned into cassava flour.

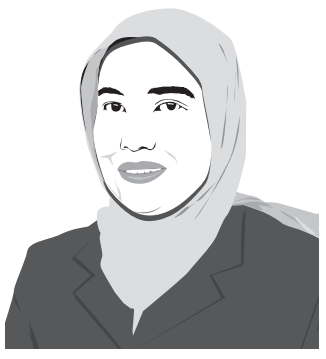
Another example of the food security culture on Kei Island is the *Hawear* tradition, a symbol and culture that forbids certain acts as taboo. It aims to protect and resolve violations of the indigenous people's rights. Although traditions such as *embal* and *Hawear* exist, they could not run progressively because of Kei Island's limited natural resources, compared to its marine resources: fishermen on Kei Island still use traditional or simple fishing gear such as lift nets, troll lines, vertical lines and pure seines. Hence, most conventional fishermen are far from prosperous.

Kei actually has strategic value in the national context because it is the national center of the capture fisheries sector. The Government has even designated Kei Island as a minapolitan area in Indonesia, based on the Decree of the Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Minister No. 32/MEN/2010. According to the concept in Spatial Planning Law No. 26/2007, a *minapolitan* can be described as a sub-area of *agropolitan*, one whose concept involves the regional-based development of a marine and fishery economy, consisting of more than one activity center in a rural area, based on the principles of integration, efficiency, quality and acceleration.

The most obvious measure left is for local government and business actors to start improving, consistently managing the waste and strengthening the economy for human resources, especially the marginal groups and traditional fishermen. Kei Island is already gifted with the sea and magnificent beaches, especially the island of Bair and the sand island of Ngurtafur. It is unique with its diverse tribes, traditions, cultures and marine ecosystems. However, the island will deteriorate if the two main issues are not handled properly. There will be discrepancies in human development and among other archipelagic regions.

In addition, there are threats of global warming, coastal erosion, high waves, hurricanes and even the loss of endemic species, such as flamingos and pelicans. Eventually, these will have grave impacts on tourism and marine development in the Kei Islands.

Opportunities and challenges of new & renewable energy transition (Part 3)



Dina Nurul Fitria
Head of the Trilogy University Agribusiness Program

To meet its energy demand, Indonesia needs an energy mix approach, optimizing each type of domestic energy source to support the realization of national energy security. As the ideal energy mix posture is being developed, it is hoped that the need for imports can be minimized and controlled.

The institutional arrangement for energy management that prioritizes state control, in line with Article 33 of Indonesia's 1945 Constitution, uses a gross split mechanism which considers four types of commonly-used concession contracts: Concession Contract, Production Sharing Contract, Service Contract and Joint Operating Agreement. These contracts are developed to satisfy the interests of two parties: the state as the owner of the energy source, represented by State-owned Enterprises (SOEs), and the contractors.

Indonesia also needs to foster the quality of its human resources, which can utilize and develop technology in the energy sector developed by Indonesia's best nationals in the Industrial Revolution 4.0 constellation. Nuclear energy is expected to bring energy sovereignty in the future.

Funding sources from petroleum funds collected from investment taxes on the energy sector will be effective for developing human resources and domestic technology. Therefore, investment results in the energy sector can be prioritized for domestic use.

Relaxation of administration for fossil energy and new and renewable energy provides a space for the birth of innovative ideas in the energy sector. In the 2020-2025 period, my work as the National Energy Council member of the consumer element, with stakeholders from the technology, academia and environment elements, includes ensuring energy elasticity of less than 1, in the range of 0.6-0.8, and realizing demand creation for household and industrial economic activities that require renewable energy complementary to fossil energy. It also includes ensuring the implementation of demand creation for renewable energy through accelerated research and technology and environmental sustainability in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

There is a disparity between the 2025 national energy policy targets and the conditions of energy supply and demand. Technology is needed to close this gap, because future oil and renewable energy depend on technology.

Derivative technical regulations of the National Energy General Plan and the Regional Energy General Plan, which guarantee innovative ideas free from restrictions of short-term and sectoral energy policy motives, must be established first. Future oil and renewable energy technologies depend on a legal framework to create an energy ecosystem that requires technology as a lever.

Our proven reserves are 3% of the world's. We can only afford 43%, while the rest cannot be obtained because of a lack of technology. Our gas reserves are 1.5% of the world's total reserves. They face a deficit, because our reserve ratio is low. When a block is found, it may take 15-20 years before the first oil can be obtained. Oil prices are almost the same as the world average. Our cost of production is higher in terms of time. Our research development ratio takes a very long time. Cost recovery is higher than state revenue. The amount of cost recovery is determined by the Special Task Force for Upstream Oil and Gas Business Activities (SKK Migas). The contracting process is also lengthy. Gross Split is based on certainty, simplicity and efficiency.

Cost recovery makes working areas unmarketable. In the 2017 gross split mechanism, some companies could obtain working areas. Gross split offers simplicity, compared to cost recovery. Oil fields, located in different locations, will have different splits. Business risks have been factored in to determine incentives, to prevent stranded reserves

There is a 5% spread between imported and produced crude needs, if we conduct production at our own plants. The electric car policy was regulated in a Presidential Regulation, but we still need cars with fuel. With an economic growth of 5% in 2045, our energy mix is still dominated by coal, not new and renewable energy. The constraint is on the new and renewable energy financing from local banks with an Internal Rate of Return of above 6%. It should be below 6%. Export Credit is below 5% for foreign banks, encouraged by the Government.

According to Government Regulation No. 79/2014 on energy policy, energy security is defined as a condition where energy availability is guaranteed, and the public can access energy at affordable prices over the long term, while considering environmental protection. The concept of energy security defined by the International Energy Agency (IEA) consists of four concepts: availability, affordability, accessibility and environmental friendliness.

The first concept, availability, refers to the availability of sources of energy supply which illustrates energy security in Indonesia. This aspect is assessed from eight indicators: fuel and LPG reserves, energy buffer reserves, fuel and LPG imports, oil imports, gas and coal Domestic Market Obligation (DMO), energy mix achievement, oil and gas reserves and resources, and coal reserves and resources. It is inevitable that energy consumption will always increase, but national energy availability will not keep up.

The inability to provide energy nationwide prompted the Government to import oil and gas from other countries.

Unraveling Policy Bottlenecks

Indonesia has a 30-45% dependency ratio on petroleum imports. Therefore, the strategy needed is to increase the level of oil exploration in Indonesia with an energy intensification policy. Also, the Government must improve the investment climate, by deregulating and de-bureaucratizing oil and gas development. To reduce dependence on imported fuel, it is necessary to increase the capacity of domestic oil plants to improve national energy security. The development of fuel plant capacity is pivotal for Indonesia because the volume of national fuel demand has been quite high, far from domestic plant fuel production. The Government and Pertamina, as an SOE, have planned to increase the plant's capacity. The National Energy General Plan states that the national oil plant capacity will be increased to more than 2 million barrels.

To guarantee energy security, the Government must provide energy buffer reserves, on the condition that the buffer reserves are excluded from the operational reserves of business entities and industries. The buffer reserves are used to address energy crises and emergencies. One of the strategies to achieve energy security is the diversification of the energy supply. Energy diversification to achieve energy security is directed at utilizing domestic energy sources whose availability is always guaranteed, such as renewable energy and domestic energy sources available in large quantities, like coal and natural gas.

The pandemic has hampered the Indonesian economy, as can be seen from reduced energy consumption. This has created an oversupply of energy. The industrial sector experienced a decline in electrical energy use, while for the household sector energy, consumption remained stable. To overcome the energy oversupply, it is necessary to increase electricity demand, by encouraging business actors to use electricity provided by PT PLN. In addition, PT Pertamina, as a business actor in the energy sector, should utilize the digital system to distribute LPG to households. A strategy is needed to optimize electricity absorption by accelerating the electrification program. It is hoped that with increased electrification, all communities can enjoy energy.

New COVID-19 variants loom over Indonesia's economy

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Narasi Institute Public Policy Specialist

The world is panicking over the new variants of COVID-19 Omicrons XBB from China. Countries in America and Europe remain alert, implementing strict flight protocols from China.

Several studies state that two of China's worst COVID-19 Omicron variants, XBB 1.5 and BQ 1.1, have appeared in various world cities, such as New York, London, Paris, Sydney and Singapore. Should Indonesians be worried?

The United States, Australia, India, Japan, Canada, Malaysia, and Singapore have strictly implemented a negative test for flight passengers two days before arriving as of January 5, 2023.

The world only concentrated on four COVID-19 variants: Alpha, Beta, Delta, and Gamma, prior to Omicron in November 2021.

There were only Alpha and Delta variants caused an infection spike globally. But Omicron offshoots have appeared in various regions with their strange worrying mutations.

Unlike other countries across America and Europe, Indonesia chose not to be bothered by the emergence of new variants.

The country has admitted that the XBB variant has penetrated Indonesia since October 10, 2022. But, still, Indonesia opted to revoke the community restriction (PPKM) last December 30, 2022. The brave step was taken as the COVID variant counted to no longer endanger people's lives.

President Jokowi blatantly visited Tanah Abang trading zone A, Jakarta, last January 2, 2023, without a mask on, showing confidence as COVID-19 has been harmless.

A reckless and dangerous act

The President's visit to Tanah Abang was considered reckless and dangerous. The President bore the risk himself, but leaders must not set a bad example for their people.

When advanced countries resolve to avoid and delay the XBB transmission, Indonesia seems to go in a different direction.

Indonesia has taken a reckless and dangerous action. Indonesia's Public Health Policy was designed hastily —not by epidemiologists— by politicians who have close relationships with corporations. Indonesia's health policy somehow differs from other countries.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) rapidly expands national genomic surveillance to monitor trends in circulating new variants, particularly by conducting a Traveler-base Genomic Surveillance (TGS) to detect and classify new virus variants through nose swab sampling at major US international airports and coronavirus testing.

Indonesia needs a better genomic surveillance

Through genomic surveillance, scientists track the spread of variants and monitor changes to the genetic code of the COVID variants. The sampling would be anonymous.

The TGS has been enacted in seven international airports across the United States, covering 500 flights from at least 30 countries, including 290 weekly flights from China and surrounding countries. There have been 80,000 tourists participating in the TGS from November 2021 to December 2022.

The surveillance quickly expanded into a national and global radar system monitoring the emergence of viruses and bacteria in the United States.

Indonesia does not have mass viral genome surveillance. We only take samples in some private and public health services. There is no such thing as COVID-19 genome surveillance.

Indonesia is supposed to conduct genome surveillance to prevent the entrance from China contracting the more vicious virus into society.

Indonesia needs to restrict Chinese migrants from entering the country, especially from the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The TGS must be conducted for all migrants and visitors and keep the samples in the genome bank.

Genome surveillance is a vital thing to do as a preventive measure for future pandemics. The pandemic has caused a rising death toll, slumped the economy and escalated the state's debts.

The fact is that COVID-19 XBB 1.5 and BQ 1.1 have penetrated Indonesia; therefore, Indonesia must be wary of the spread of the new variants.

Extra restricted Airport and Seaport Regulations

Indonesia often relaxes the entry restrictions for Chinese foreign workers, thereby increasing the risk of COVID-19 new variant transmission. Indonesia must not claim to have a tested and proven COVID handling system.

Being vigilant in preventing virus transmission would be easier if the country's international entrances, be it through airports or seaports, were being carefully monitored and restricted, as well as recording migrants and visitors properly.