

# As RI turns 80, the fight against corruption continues

As Indonesia nears its 80<sup>th</sup> year of independence, the nation should reflect on its maturity as a sovereign and democratic state. Yet instead of strengthening with age, the republic shows signs of internal decay: Corruption is rampant, law enforcement is paralyzed, and the spirit of legal reform that once flared in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has now dimmed without direction.

This isn't just a technical failure. It is a severe crisis of public trust in institutions meant to uphold the law. Scandal after scandal involving law enforcement officials has created the impression that the law is sharp for the weak but dull for the powerful. This eroding trust threatens state legitimacy, as a legal system without public confidence is merely an illusion of justice.

Corruption, once localized, now permeates all institutions. In the executive branch, numerous regional leaders have been embroiled in graft scandals, such as former Malang regent Rendra Kresna, former South Sumatra governor Syahril Oesman and Rachmat Yasin Bogor regent Rachmat Yasin.

The legislature faces a similar issue. As of July 2023, the Corruption Eradication Commission

(KPK) has recorded 344 graft cases involving members of national and regional legislatures, including high-profile offenders like Setya Novanto, a former House of Representatives speaker who was sentenced to 15 years for embezzling funds from the e-ID project.

Even the judiciary is tarnished, with two former Constitutional Court justices, Akil Mochtar and Patrialis Akbar, convicted of accepting bribes in relation to a case.

Despite the ongoing efforts of the KPK and the Attorney General's Office (AGO), genuine deterrence remains elusive. In 2022, the KPK handled 36 cases with Rp 2.2 trillion (US\$134.3 million) in estimated state losses, while the AGO investigated 138 cases that incurred Rp 1.3 trillion in state losses. In 2024, the Corruption Perceptions Index for Indonesia rose to 37 out of 100, a marginal increase yet one that still signaled an emergency. Meanwhile, public trust in the anticorruption body has plummeted since the revision of the KPK Law in 2019.



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As Indonesia approaches its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it stands at a historical crossroads. Will the republic continue to be commandeered by elites who disregard the Constitution and betray the people's aspirations, or can the nation reignite a sense of nationhood, implement sweeping legal reform and establish a government that is clean, just and transparent?

President Sukarno's concept of Trisakti—political sovereignty, economic self-reliance and cultural identity—was a call to strengthen the nation from within. Yet today, Indonesia is beset by a legitimacy crisis from within its very institutions. Failure to act swiftly risks it becoming an aging republic that has lost its soul, estranged from justice and devoid of genuine sovereignty.

It is time for the people to demand the fulfillment of the constitutional promise. It is time for the nation's leaders to stop making excuses and start taking action. Welcoming Indonesia's 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary should not be a mere

symbolic celebration but a critical moment to reclaim the true meaning of independence, once declared through the blood and sacrifice of the nation's founders.

Ironically, this bleak reality contrasts sharply with the government's enthusiastically promoted vision of Golden Indonesia 2045. How can Indonesia hope to become a sovereign and advanced nation when corruption has taken root and the law is no longer trusted? If these conditions are not swiftly addressed, Indonesia risks descending into a "failed state": a mature republic by age yet fragile in its values, broken in its function and adrift in its vision.

What is more troubling is the complete absence of any serious, comprehensive and systemic effort to eradicate corruption at its roots. Legal reform remains trapped on paper. Political rhetoric about anticorruption echoes in official forums, but fades into silence on the ground. Many officials treat the issue as a campaign slogan, not as a matter of moral and institutional urgency.

Institutions that should be on the front line of anticorruption have been rendered toothless. The once mighty KPK appears demoralized and shackled. Law enforcement seems increasingly

selective, and major cases are either unresolved or quietly fade away. The public has grown apathetic, seeing that justice moves slowly, if at all, and that it often seems negotiable.

If this pattern continues, the nation will not only fail to achieve the aspirations of the Golden Indonesia vision, but will also jeopardize its very identity as a lawful and democratic state. The failure to confront corruption with firm resolve is tantamount to surrendering the republic's dignity.

Extraordinary action is required for a crisis this deep, not just perfunctory steps of business as usual. The government must take bold and sweeping measures: reforming public office recruitment, ensuring budget transparency at every level and opening the door wide for civil society to participate in oversight and decision-making. Law enforcement must be restored to full independence, free from political interference and uncompromising against any violation, however small.

Above all, the floor cannot be cleaned with a dirty broom. Corruption cannot be defeated if those leading the charge are entangled in conflicts of interest. Law enforcers, institutional lead-

ers and political elites involved in corrupt networks must first be swept out. Moral courage and exemplary leadership from the top are indispensable. Only when those in power demonstrate uncompromised integrity and a genuine sense of duty to serve the public can true change begin.

To that end, rebuilding a strong culture of civic ethics and character education is essential, not merely through theoretical modules in classrooms but embodied in the everyday conduct of the nation's leaders. Transformation is needed from top to bottom: from individual moral formation to the strict vetting of public officials and the creation of a robust, transparent and accountable oversight system. The Indonesian people, long betrayed by a system corrupted from within, deserve assurance that their country is not being devoured by predators in power.

The nation's 80<sup>th</sup> independence anniversary should mark a start to reform that is pursued with bravery, honesty and genuine leadership to reclaim our rightful path to true freedom from a new kind of colonization: corruption. Only then can Indonesia face a future with our heads held high, rather than bowed in shame.