

Bobby's North Sumatra gubernatorial bid gains steam

PDI-P, PKS explore potential alliance to prevent him from securing easy victory

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The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

The potential candidacy of Bobby Nasution, the son-in-law of President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, in the North Sumatra gubernatorial race, is gaining traction among political parties as he now has the support of more than half of the parties in the local legislature.

All four members of the Onward Indonesia Coalition (KIM), the electoral alliance behind the February victory of president-elect Prabowo Subianto, have now their early support behind Bobby.

They include Prabowo's Gerindra Party, of which Bobby is a member, the Golkar Party which won the most seats in North Sumatra in February's election, the National Mandate Party (PAN) and the Democratic Party.

Bobby's bid has recently also gained the support of the Nas-

Dem Party and the National Awakening Party (PKB), two out of three parties that backed unsuccessful opposition presidential candidate Anies Baswedan.

The six parties collectively control 62 of 100 seats on the North Sumatra legislative council and are eligible to nominate a joint candidate pair in the gubernatorial election in November.

PKB deputy chair Jazilul Fawaid predicted that Bobby would easily win a majority of the vote with the support of the alliance, which he called "a super coalition".

"We call it a super coalition because that implies that the light of victory is with Mas Bobby. Together with the PKB and other supporting parties, we just need to decide who the deputy gubernatorial candidate will be," Jazilul said recently.

Another potential backer is the National Development Party (PPP), a Muslim-based party

that backed the other unsuccessful presidential candidate, Ganjar Pranowo, in the February race.

While nothing is set until political parties register their candidates with the General Elections Commission (KPU) in early August, an analyst said the presence of two powerful figures—Jokowi and Prabowo—behind Bobby might have boosted the confidence of other parties to also support the incumbent Medan mayor.

"Jokowi's political patronage certainly influences the discussion among political parties and is what eventually drives them to throw their support behind Bobby," political analyst Faisal Riza of the North Sumatra State Islamic University (UINSU) said.

Moreover, "Bobby himself, despite the political privilege he gets from being Jokowi's son-in-law, is quite promising electorally as he is viewed as an alternative

figure that could offer new hope to the people of North Sumatra after Edy Rahmayadi's leadership failed to bring about significant changes in the province," Faisal said.

Edy, a retired military general, served as North Sumatra governor from 2018 to 2023. He has expressed his intention to seek reelection in November but has not received any support from political parties so far.

Responding to accusations from critics, including his former party the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), that he played a major role in paving the way for Bobby, Jokowi said political parties considered the candidacy rationally.

"Ask the question to political parties. Parties are smart. Usually, [they] look at the electability rating," Jokowi said last week.

With a growing number of parties declaring support for Bob-

by, questions have emerged over whether he will be the sole candidate in an uncontested election.

The PDI-P, the only party other than Golkar that has enough seats in the local legislature to field its own candidate pair, had initially hinted at the possibility of supporting Bobby in November, even though the party fired him for refusing to support its presidential candidate Ganjar.

But the PDI-P later considered preventing Bobby from being the sole candidate and claiming an easy victory.

"Will it be good for our democracy if we let Bobby run an uncontested election? I'd say, whenever possible, we should avoid this occurrence. Let the people have a choice," PDI-P executive Djarot Syaiful Hidayat said on Thursday.

He said Bobby's growing support would not scare the PDI-P and that it would not necessarily translate into an election victory.

He said the PDI-P "will form our own alliance: a partnership with the people".

Djarot said the PDI-P is currently scouting potential candidates, including former North Sumatra governor Edy, incumbent North Tapanuli Regent Nikson Nababan, North Sumatra councilor Sutarto and House of Representatives member Sofyan Tan.

The PDI-P is now in talks with the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), the remaining party in the three-way alliance that supported Anies and that has yet to decide on which candidate pair to back in the North Sumatra race.

PKS chairman Ahmad Syaikh also suggested that his party would support Bobby but later retracted his statement, clarifying that the party had yet to decide on which candidate pair it would back for the North Sumatra race.

"Everything is still being discussed," Syaikh said.

Explosive ash



Mount Lewotobi Laki-laki spews volcanic ash on Sunday during an eruption as seen from Boru village in East Flores, East Nusa Tenggara.

Fans praise Indonesia's new Olympic uniforms

Alifia Sekar

The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

With the opening ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games just around the corner, the world's largest premiere multisport event is not just about competition at the courts, fields, tracks, pools and other venues: It is also a design contest for the most captivating uniforms among participating countries.

For some of the country's sports fans, the official uniforms of the Indonesian Olympic team is already leading the competition, thanks to their "elegant" and "minimalist" design.

On July 4, the Indonesian Olympic Committee (KOI) launched its official collection of uniforms for the country's Paris Games contingent, consisting of jerseys, shorts, pants and jackets designed in a red, white and black color scheme.

Each uniform is emblazoned with a patch on the left breast featuring the Garuda Pancasila national emblem, the Olympic rings and text reading "Tim Indonesia" (Team Indonesia), enclosed in a ring of red and white, the national colors.

On the right breast is the logo of Li Ning Company Limited, the Chinese athletic apparel and footwear firm that has been sponsoring the Indonesian contingent since the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

Aside from the competition uniforms, the collection also has a special set of uniforms to be worn during medal ceremonies.

Presiding over the departure ceremony for the Indonesian contingent on Wednesday at Merdeka Palace, President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo conveyed his hope that the athletes would "be optimistic and compete enthusiastically" to bring home medals and make Indonesia proud.

The uniforms' launch was a feast for the eyes for people

like Ina Yosia, a the 23-year-old graphic designer from Yogyakarta, who sees the quadrennial sporting event as an occasion for supporting Indonesian athletes as well as for viewing the diverse designs of participating countries.

"The [official uniform] design this year feels much more modern, with minimalist graphics and simple black," Ina told *The Jakarta Post* on Friday, and that she already liked what she had seen.

"I prefer this year's outfits compared to the last Olympics in Tokyo, which looked like the gymnastics uniforms from the 1990s to me," she added with a chuckle.

Ina also said she hoped to see that the opening ceremony uniforms incorporated more traditional elements, so audiences around the world would recognize Indonesian athletes at a single glance.

But for Nuning Triana, an office worker and badminton enthusiast from Mojokerto, East Java, the Indonesian contingent would be instantly recognizable because the red and white national colors and the Garuda Pancasila featured prominently in this year's design.

"The design not only looks minimalist and elegant, but truly represents an Indonesian icon," she said.

"I'm so proud, and hope that the uniform can boost athletes' spirit when they are competing."

Indonesia's 2024 Olympics uniforms were designed by Ragowo "Didit" Hediprasetyo Djojohadikusumo, the only son of Defense Minister and president-elect Prabowo Subianto.

This was not the first time designing sports uniforms for Didit, who also designed the jerseys for Italian soccer team Como 1907, which is owned by businessmen Robert Budi Hartono and Michael Bambang Har-

tono of Djarum Group.

According to Didit, the design of Indonesia's Paris Olympics uniforms was inspired by the "Berkibarlah Benderaku" (Fly My Flag), a national song composed by Saridjah Niung Bintang Soedibjo, popularly known as "Ibu Soed".

"Hopefully, [the athletes] will always strive for and gain achievements as well as make Indonesia proud [in these uniforms]," the designer said during the launch event, as quoted by *kompas.com*.

Indonesia's chef de mission Anindya Novyan Bakrie said the KOI decided to collaborate on the official uniforms with Didit, as he had made his mark as a designer in Paris, the host city of the 2024 Summer Games.

Graduating from art and design school Parsons Paris in 2007, Didit rose to prominence following his debut show at the Spring/Summer 2010 Paris Couture Fashion Week, and has since regularly presented his couture collections during Paris Fashion Week.

Other countries have also collaborated with renowned designers on their Olympic uniforms: Italy joined hands with Italian luxury fashion house Armani's sportswear line EA7, and host country France partnered with local luxury brand Berluti.

While many countries have been complimented on their Olympic uniforms, Malaysia's official apparel was immediately slammed by netizens, who criticized the design as "cheap" and "ugly", *The Star* reported.

The criticism prompted the Olympic Council of Malaysia (OCM) to rework the design immediately. The new design was launched on July 2, with OCM president Mohamad Norza Zakaria calling it "fiercer-looking" for featuring more prominent tiger stripes.

'Smart plaster' can measure blood sugar without prick

Kharishar Kahfi

The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

Until now, people have had to prick their fingers or use an expensive and rigid sensor to test their blood for glucose, urea and other indicators; experiences that are not comfortable for many.

But researchers have found a way to measure those biomarkers through sweat, using a plaster-like device that may pave the way for a non-invasive health monitoring solution, according to a recent study.

The idea from the device came into Yu-Cheng Chen's mind when he had his finger pricked during a medical checkup last year.

"Although the finger prick was not that bad, [...] actually, I didn't like it at all," Chen, an assistant professor at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), said to *The Jakarta Post* on Thursday.

The experience reminded him of his grandmother and the other 4.7 million Singaporeans with diabetes, who must test their blood sugar level every morning.

"I thought maybe there was a way that we could make it easier to measure your glucose level and other health factors as well," Chen said.

Chen and other researchers at the NTU's School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering developed what they call a "smart plaster": a hydrogel plaster filled with liquid crystal droplets filled with micro lasers, a type of laser that uses a small and high-frequency beam of light.

When stuck onto the patient's skin, the hydrogel absorbs their sweat, which contains a very low concentration of various substances including glucose, lactate and urea. The crystal droplets then detect and amplify the substances in the sweat with mi-

cro lasers fluctuating based on the concentration of the material found.

In the study, published in the *Analytical Chemistry* journal in May, the research team put three sensors in the plaster to detect glucose, lactate and urea, which are often used to estimate whether a patient has diabetes. Each sensor is given a different color.

"Within one bandage, we can actually have at least nine sensors which means it can detect at least nine different components," Chen said.

"Maybe in the future, we will be more interested in detecting your calcium, cancer biomarkers or something else."

The device can detect both the high and low range of substances levels, said Nie Ningyuan, a doctoral candidate at NTU and the first author of the study.

This capability will be helpful for diabetic patients compared to similar health monitoring devices currently circulating which only focus on tracking high glucose levels, but not abnormal or low ones that may indicate other health complications.

"In comparison, our device will provide a clearer picture of the users' health condition with a variety of readings captured," Ningyuan said in a statement issued by the university on July 8.

Such innovation may help diabetic patients who need to monitor their blood glucose level frequently to avoid hypoglycemia, a condition in which blood sugar level drops too low, causing fatigue, seizures or loss of consciousness, said Lin Chun-Hsien, a physician of National Taiwan University Hospital in Taiwan, who was not involved in the NTU study.

The smart plaster could also help patients who fear pain and

bleeding when using the finger prick test.

"I am hopeful that this laser-based, non-invasive wearable device [...] can provide a more convenient and effective way to monitor patients' blood glucose," Lin said in the NTU statement, calling the ability to measure other biomarkers a bonus to help both patients and doctors.

While the researchers succeeded in making the sensor plaster-sized and inexpensive, their focus now is resizing the reader, with the device's size the main hurdle for mass production.

The reader used for the study contained many large components, such as a spectrometer to read the signal from the laser and transfer it to the readout.

"That's all we're looking for in the future. It's currently the size of your [computer] at home, but, of course, we want it to be smaller, like the size of a cellphone," Chen said.

Chen and the other researchers may find the solution soon with the help of others, as he said that he had calls from local and foreign companies from India to France that were interested in developing the device for the mass market.

The smart plaster is still a proof of concept as of today, but it may be realized into a product that helps 537 million adults living with diabetes worldwide, according to an estimate by the World Health Organization, before the chronic disease develops into another condition, such as kidney or liver failure.

"It's not just like we are trying to develop a sensor that tells you yes or no that you have diabetes," Chen said.

"It can provide you with more information related to diabetes even at the late or early stage. That's what we are looking into."

Former Chinese kindergartens pivot to senior care

Matthew Walsh and Emily Wang

Agence France-Presse/Taiyuan, China

Senior citizens sway to old-time tunes at a former kindergarten in northern China, as educators turn their sights away from children in the face of a rapidly aging population and a baby bust.

Hundreds of millions of Chinese are set to enter old age in the coming decades while the country's chronically low birth rate leaves ever fewer people to replace them, official statistics show.

The crisis is already hitting the education sector, with thousands of preschools closing around the country as enrollments dry up.

But others are changing with the times—such as a facility in Shanxi province, which has traded chortling children for a more mature cohort.

"[The problem] became particularly evident as the number of children continued to decrease," principal Li Xiuling, 56, told AFP.

"After my kindergarten emptied out, I thought about how to make the best use of it," she said.

Li's preschool was founded in 2005 and once served as many as 280 children, but closed last year.

It reopened in December as Impressions of Youth, a recreational center for people of retirement age and above.

The space in the provincial capital Taiyuan boasts around



Happy old days: Participants attend a dancing class on July 2 at a kindergarten-turned-elderly center in Taiyuan, in China's northern Shanxi province. Senior citizens sway to old-time tunes in the classroom of a former kindergarten in northern China, as educators turn their sights away from children in the face of a rapidly aging population and a baby bust.

100 adult learners of music, dance, modeling and other subjects.

"It's quite a progressive idea," Li said.

"They come to fulfill some of the dreams they had when they were young."

'I'm young again'

On a rainy morning this month, a modeling instructor led a line of immaculately coiffed older women as they sashayed around the classroom in traditional cheongsam dresses and pink oil-paper parasols.

In another class, students sat

in a semicircle beating African drums in time to soaring socialist songs.

He Ying, 63, said joining the center had helped her overcome a post-retirement lack of confidence and meet new friends.

"I used to feel that my cultural life [...] was very impoverished, that there wasn't much meaning in going on living," she told AFP.

"[People here] are not just waiting to grow old."

Nearly 15,000 kindergartens closed in China last year as enrollments plunged by 5.3 million compared to 2022, according to government data.