

Indonesia must seek survival in its diversity

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Agus Pakpahan , Jakarta

Next to the desk in my office, a *garuda*, Indonesia's national bird, hangs holding a ribbon that says: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* -- Unity in Diversity. I also hang the same state symbol in my living room at home.

A friend once asked me, ""Why do you put that logo up on your living room wall?"" My reply was that I was proud of being part of our unique cultural diversity.

Unity in diversity is not an imaginary thing. It is the long historical fact that built a nation called Indonesia. It is the realization of uniqueness across the cultural diversity that enriches Indonesia's territory from Sabang to Merauke. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is the magic phrase that unites our nation.

So, when the modern world talks about pluralism, our founding fathers have already built Indonesia based on the uniqueness of our diversity. We have a strong belief and we accept that what we inherit now is rooted from the fact that we formed a nation not because we were similar, but because we were different. We have our own uniqueness. Unity in diversity is our spiritual capital that enables us to live as one nation in a unique way.

Language is a basic social creation that keeps a community alive. The Indonesian language is our medium to bridge the communication gap among different local languages. It is an unparalleled invention of our nation. Sometimes we do not realize that Bahasa Indonesia is our most important cultural resource that unites us without disregarding the local languages that are part of our cultural heritage and enrich the national language. In the era of globalization, Bahasa Indonesia is very adaptive to foreign languages.

Bahasa Indonesia enables us to adopt and to adapt to future global changes without having to worry about whether we will lose our identity. Of course, we also have to master foreign languages as a consequence of the globalized world.

Whether or not Indonesia will exist in 2050 or 2100 will be determined by our capability to maintain and to practice *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* in our political, economic and daily affairs. I believe that local or regional conflicts have resulted from violations of our *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* principle. The concentration of wealth in one place such as Jakarta can be seen as another example of violation of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. We have to build not only one ""top of the mountain"" but multiple peaks, with each of them representing our cultural diversity. This means we build our strength in all the regions.

If we try to develop a philosophy of dominance, it will spark a strong chain reaction that weakens the whole system. We cannot follow the lead of the Dutch colonists who conquered the archipelago by use of force. We cannot use military power to maintain territorial unity.

What must be done is to spread the seeds of ideas that enable people to gain the benefits of our uniqueness. The meaning of wealth is not just in terms of physical or material things. Indonesia has its own feelings and awareness that binds us together, in so far as we see fairness and justice in our daily lives.

The key is how we can plant the seeds of respect among us, respecting our differences. I believe that is something we need to think of seriously as we celebrate Indonesia's 62nd Independence Day.

The writer is an agricultural economist who specializes in natural resources and institutional economics. He can be reached at ciboerial@yahoo.com.