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From the Danantara Indonesia Investor Relations Team

COMPANIES OF DANANTARA INDONESIA

When a Country Goes Home: Mudik

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Photo credit: Irine Wiguno

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"We expect **more from technology** and **less from each other**.
We create technology to provide **the illusion of companionship
without the demands of friendship.**"

SHERRY TURKLE, American sociologist and Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor
at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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What forces hold back the potential of Indonesia's young generation?

A simple question, with predictably sobering answers: socioeconomic challenges that compound with each generation, jobs that grow but careers that do not, paths toward success which require leaving the country altogether. But these forces that erode human capital are not unique to Indonesia. They are global, and they are accelerating, including in developed markets.

Somewhere in San Francisco, a device exists to combat loneliness. A small AI-powered necklace was conceived while its creator travelled through Japan, where they witnessed the social issue of extreme loneliness. The necklace was thus built to simulate friendship by sending timely positive text messages. Yet, this is not a mere novelty. It is a product born from a genuine market need.

It is worth remembering that over a quarter of people globally report chronic loneliness. It is a condition whose health consequences are now clinically comparable to smoking fifteen cigarettes a day.

We are now witnessing the slow replacement of real relationships with digital substitutes. The glorification of convenience over connection. The erosion of social capital that makes societies function. Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist at New York University's Stern School of Business, maps its consequences in *The Anxious Generation: a cohort raised on screens, deprived of independence, structurally cut off from the ups and downs of real-world relationships that build resilience.*



Moments before Eid al-Fitr prayers in Yogyakarta. Courtesy of Dwi, the chauffeur we follow in this piece. / Photo credit: Dwi

The market's response to the damage it has caused is, characteristically, to sell us another solution: a wearable AI pendant to replace genuine human connection. Indonesia, however, offers a different approach. It happens every year, in the weeks surrounding Eid al-Fitr.

It is called *mudik*.

And it is, perhaps unwittingly, an act of resistance against the global shift where societies have traded community for convenience.



Photo credit: Telkom

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The world is attempting to simulate what Indonesia continues to produce at scale annually: the irreplaceable texture of human connection. In 2024, an estimated 193.6 million Indonesians made the journey, visiting their hometowns and villages, roughly 40 million from Greater Jakarta alone.

The money moves with them. Between Rp 137 to 145 trillion flowed through the economy during the 2025 Eid season: through toll booths and bus tickets, boxes of *dodo*/treats and envelopes pressed into the hands of nieces and nephews. This year, the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KADIN) projected that money circulation could reach Rp 148 to 160 trillion. According to the Mandiri Spending Index, consumer spending continued to accelerate in the weeks leading up to Eid al-Fitr, with the index reaching 124.3, up from 117.0 during the Eid period last April.

This Eid season, the Ministry of Transportation forecasts 143.9 million Indonesians traveling, or *mudik*, back home. Outbound *mudik* flow peaked on March 18, three days before Eid, with more than 270,315 vehicles recorded, up 4.6 percent from 2025. In total, 2.52 million vehicles left Jakarta, a slight 0.9 percent increase compared to 2025.

Despite the higher volumes, road accidents declined, as a result of cross-sector coordination and the use of technology in traffic management, according to Pratikno, the Coordinating Minister for Human Development and Culture.

For the people inside those vehicles, it is more than a holiday. It is an annual reckoning with where they actually belong.

What It Takes

For Rahman, the *mudik* journey is muscle memory by now. Every year since he came to Jakarta, the office boy from the Cirebon-Brebes border makes the same preparation: ensuring the motorbike and the body are in top condition. He rides home with his wife, on one motorbike, covering roughly 250 kilometers.

It is six hours with one rest stop and cooperative traffic.

When asked what *mudik* means to him, he exhales. "*Bayar hutang rindu*," he says. Paying a debt of longing. And when he finally arrives, the feeling is simple and total. "*Seneng, mbak. Ketemu keluarga. Kumpul keluarga*." Happy. Together. The loudest, fullest version of home.

Mobility may look a little different for those with children. Dwi is a planner by nature. Perhaps because he spent thirteen years as a chauffeur, and must navigate the complex Jakarta roads and traffic flows every day. His hometown is Yogyakarta, and his *mudik* preparation is systematic and rational: finances first, always. "*Yang pasti materi dulu*," he laughs. Once that is settled, it is a matter of packing clothes and gifts.

But ask him what *mudik* means, and the answer goes deeper than logistics. *Silaturahmi* to parents and siblings, or the act of maintaining bonds with family and loved ones. A longing for his hometown. And, lastly, something he places equal weight on: "*mencari keberkahan dari orang tua*." Seeking the blessing of parents.

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"Happy. To meet my family, to gather with them. It is the most lively moment."

- Rahman on what it is like to spend Lebaran at home



Dwi and his family at Gelora Bung Karno: a keepsake from this year's mudik / Photo credit: Dwi

Dwi's Eid in Yogyakarta is full of important family rituals. *Sungkem* to his parents: the Javanese gesture of bowing before one's elders as an act of reverence. Visiting the graves of his grandparents. Slowly, the ache of missing one's birthplace is relieved. Finally, on his last day, he visits Gunungkidul, the limestone hills east of Yogyakarta, which he describes as a place that has never disappointed him. "*Selalu bikin rindu*." Makes him miss it without fail.

His wife and two children, fifteen and eight, make the journey with him every year. They sit with the grandparents, take part in the *sungkem*, and are present for familial conversations that no classroom and curriculum can provide.

In collectivistic cultures, children are often exposed early to adult social spaces. Research on multigenerational integration finds that these children show measurably better emotional and cognitive outcomes. The Western habit of separation, or what we now know as the "kids' table," is now being identified as a developmental liability instead.

But Dwi is not thinking about the research. In Indonesia, with how Eid is structured culturally for generations, families have been running this social experiment at scale long before anyone thought to study it. To collapse generational distance and create intergenerational bonds, it turns out, is one of the most developmentally beneficial things a family can do.

Unlike Rahman, Dwi does not drive home. As he has done several times before, Dwi and his family took the *Program Mudik Gratis BUMN*: a free homecoming program run by Danantara Indonesia companies.

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All aboard: the bus taking the Yogyakarta route, and Dwi home / Photo credit: Dwi

A friend who works at Bank Mandiri sent the registration link mid-Ramadan. Within an hour, the slot was confirmed. By 7pm, barcoded tickets appeared on his phone.

Between Rahman's motorbike and Dwi's bus seat, the full shape of *mudik* comes into focus once again. It is not just one story, but millions of individual connections between family members vendors, offices, and transportation infrastructure. The arithmetic of money, motorbikes, and registration links sent through WhatsApp: all converging towards one mission.

Home, by whatever means necessary.

A Candid Conversation

My friend lives down a small alleyway off Jeruk Purut in South Jakarta, where navigation apps would route drivers into and then abandon. Hence, I met my taxi driver further up the street instead, so he could find me more easily in the larger main street.

The ride started in comfortable silence and the streets were emptier than they had any right to be on a typical Tuesday night. So, I took a chance.

"Bapak kemarin mudik?"

It is the kind of question most taxi drivers ask their passengers, not vice versa. Yet I wanted to know.

He chuckled. The kind of chuckle that acknowledges the role reversal without making it a big deal.

Mohamad Apriyadi is my Bluebird driver. For now. His real job, one that he proudly speaks of and has been doing for the last nineteen years, is on a cruise ship, working the hospitality function.

Right now, he is supposed to be somewhere in the middle of the ocean. But the war in Iran has pushed his deployment. So, he drives. Picking up passengers like me who stayed in the almost-empty capital during Eid, where for once, we do not need to lie to friends about our ETA.

He mentioned his son, still in middle school, born in 2013: the same cohort as Nadia, the youngest character in Pandu Sjahrir's year-end letter. Curious, I asked what his son wanted to be when he grows up. Mohamad did not hesitate: he wants him to follow the same path. The sea. A fisherman, a sailor, anything that keeps him on the water. The ocean has been good to his family.

When Eid came, Mohamad did not go home. His wife and son, who live in Bali, made the journey to Jakarta instead. An inversion of the whole idea of mudik: the family finding its way to the worker, instead of the worker returning to the family.

Stories like Mohamad's are a single dot in a larger Pointillist canvas. He spoke about it the way Indonesians speak about things beyond their control: *mau gimana lagi?* What can you do. The particular peace someone achieves when he learns to let life arrange itself around the things that cannot be changed.

The Program Behind the Barcode

In 2026, the *Program Mudik Gratis* departed 116,688 travelers toward more than 200 districts and cities across Indonesia, exceeding its own target by roughly ten percent. The program mobilized 1,541 buses, 99 train sets, and 46 vessels, coordinated across BP BUMN, Danantara Indonesia, and 96 Danantara Indonesia companies.



Photo credit: Jasa Raharja

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Jasa Raharja, the social insurance firm focused on transportation accidents, serves as head coordinator. BNI, Mandiri, PLN, Pertamina, KAI, ASDP: the roster reads like a cross-section of Indonesian public economic life. Each company ran its own registration, routes, and quota. Together, they covered the entire country.

The program, which started in 2015, has a clear rationale: amongst its goals is to reduce the number of people making the journey on motorbikes. After all, it is the mode that makes *mudik* season the deadliest stretch of road on the calendar.



Photo credit: Jasa Raharja

Rahman, riding to Cirebon-Brebes with his wife on one motorbike, is exactly the kind of journey this program exists to offer an alternative to. Though this year it could not, since none of the available routes stopped by his hometown. Telkomsel alone allocated 1,924 slots, connecting travelers to popular routes across Java and Sumatra.



Photo credit: Telkom

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The program is more than just logistics. It is really about communal intent: 96 state enterprises deploying public capital not toward financial returns, but toward reducing the distance between a worker and their family, between the nationwide economy that concentrates in Jakarta and the communities that feed it.

In a world selling AI pendants as a substitute for companionship, this is what investing in human connection looks like.

The Distance Between Here and Home

Jakarta in the days after the *mudik* exodus is an experience.

The city softens. The usual aggressive traffic dissolves. Street vendors pack up early. The air smells different: less exhaust, more *opor ayam* drifting from the few warungs still open.

For several days, Indonesia's foremost urban area takes up the soul of a large kampung.

It is a reminder of what the city is made of, and who made it. The Jakarta that roars back to life after Eid is built on the efforts of its people. People who arrived from all corners of the archipelago, who send money home, who count the months until they can go back, who spend a year in the city and a few precious days remembering who they were before it.



At the shores of a Gunungkidul beach / Photo credit: Dwi

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Stories like theirs actively resist the loneliness epidemic. Indonesia, in performing this migration at scale, is doing something the world's wealthiest societies are failing to do: maintaining the social infrastructure of human connection. One person, one motorbike, one bus seat at a time.

Mudik is not a disruption to the Indonesian economy. It is its most honest expression. It is active resistance to a deeply individualistic mode of living peddled by societies around the world. Lastly, it is also an economically forward-looking one.

Artificial intelligence is automating technical skills by the day. A LinkedIn global survey found that 92 percent of talent professionals now say soft skills are equally or more important than hard skills. What will matter most in the years ahead are empathy, trust, the ability to read a room, to sit with silence, and to navigate the discomfort and challenges of human relationships.

These are precisely the skills *mudik* practises and renews every year, by over 140 million people. One where knowing how to be with people will matter as much as knowing how to do things. Dwi's children, sitting with their grandparents in Yogyakarta, are already training for this future.

These are not things any algorithm can replicate. *Mudik* is an annual insistence that digital convenience will not replace the drive home, the debt of longing paid, and the smell of a grandmother's kitchen in Yogyakarta.

And expressions this profound deserve to be made easier.

The aspiration is a country where *mudik* looks different. Not smaller: the ritual is too deep, too beloved to dissolve. But lighter and easier. Because home is worth returning to.



Photo credit: Irine Wiguno

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"To me, Lebaran is silaturahmi to my parents and siblings, longing for my hometown, and seeking the blessing of my parents."

- Dwi shares why Lebaran is important to him

Did You Know?



The Javanese grasshopper, or as they call it in Gunungkidul, an afternoon snack / Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons

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Gunungkidul is famed for its beautiful beaches, like the one Dwi captured. Yet funnily, locals have another name for it: *Jogja Lantai Dua*, or the Second Floor of Yogyakarta. The nickname nods to the regency's hilly terrain and cliffs, which offer sweeping views from above.

A visit to the area is incomplete without bringing home *thiwul*, a savory dish made from cassava that has long served as a staple substitute for rice. It is typically enjoyed with tempeh or tofu, and finished with shredded salted coconut, sambal, and fresh vegetables.

And for the more adventurous eater: Gunungkidul has a reputation for "extreme culinary." Eating insects is common among locals, and Dwi was more than happy to show us (almost with a hint of promoting) a bucket of *belalang kayu*, or Javanese wood grasshoppers, ready to be eaten. High in protein, they are described to be spicy and savory, with a crunch.

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Danantara Indonesia Diaries is a newsletter produced by Danantara Indonesia's investor relations team.

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