

DANANTARA INDONESIA  
**DIARIES**

From the Danantara Indonesia Investor Relations Team

**INVESTING AT DANANTARA INDONESIA**

## The Man Who Forgot His Phone Number

A phone-free café in Magelang taught us a lesson about Indonesia's demographic future.

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Photo credit: Danantara Indonesia Investor Relations Team

*“Selarasnya mimpi dan interaksi dalam segelas kopi. **The harmony of dreams and conversation, in a single glass of coffee.**”*

Printed, in fading white script, on the t-shirt of the man across the table

The sun comes up early over Magelang, and it does not ask permission. One moment the rice paddies are dark mirrors holding the last of the night. The next, the whole valley is gold, and the young *padi* stands in its flooded rows like a congregation at prayer.

Two volcanoes watch from the horizon. Merapi exhales a thin plume of breath the way old men here exhale their *kretek*: slowly, without urgency, as if time were a thing they owned rather than rented. That Saturday morning, we were sitting at Kopi Mpat.

The coffee is good, black, and honest, served in a plain glass mug beside a little swing-top bottle of raw sugar. The food is *lebih ke masakan rumah*, simple home cooking that makes you feel less like a customer and more like family. But what makes Kopi Mpat special is harder to photograph, though heaven knows we tried.

It is the nature, and it is the conversation we had there. We sit on a wooden deck that seems to float on a pond the color of green tea. Papyrus reeds shoot up through the water like arrows frozen mid-flight.



*Photo credit: Danantara Indonesia Investor Relations team*

Giant taro leaves lean over their own reflections. Coconut palms tilt at the sky. Everything grows at its own pace and in its own direction, which tells you the spirit of the place: the only rule here is patience.

What we talked about that morning turned out to matter more than a café conversation should. It touched a question Danantara Indonesia has staked its mandate on: whether Indonesia is investing in its people as seriously as it invests in its resources.

And then there is the conversation.

## A Morning with Pak Bada

We were in Magelang one July weekend for the Taruna NusantaraRun, organized by the Taruna Nusantara school. On the list of sponsors are a who's who of state-owned enterprises, or now Danantara Indonesia companies: everybody from Pertamina, Bank Mandiri, PLN, Telkom, BRI, BNI, and more.

In between the warm-ups and stretches and the run itself, we found ourselves at Kopi Mpat. That is where we met Bada.

Originally from West Java, Bada lived in Japan for fifteen years, studying and working as a graphic designer. His world was one of deadlines, pixels, and the precision of Japanese professional life.



Photo credit: Taruna NusantaraRun

*"Kita hidup di kota, semuanya tercukupi, tapi lihat sekeliling, orang-orang seperti nggak punya mimpi, seakan-akan terpaksa harus hidup,"* he told us. Living in the city, everything is readily available, but look around, and people seem to have no dreams left, as if forced simply to survive.

*"Di sini, kita kembali menjadi manusia."*

Here, we become human again.

So he came home and began to buy land. Piece by piece, *sawah* by *sawah*, he secured the entire eight hectares. Today, those eighty thousand square meters of Central Java are held together by one man's patience.

His ambition for the land is aggressively simple: a completely natural landscape, free of chemicals and manicured lawns pretending to be Europe. Here, the tropics are simply allowed to be the tropics, with ferns crowding the walkways, water finding its own level, and fish rising in the pond at dusk. After fifteen years of designing on screens, Pak Bada now designs with rain, soil, and time.

But here is the design decision that stopped us. At Kopi Mpat, the refusal is built into the architecture: there are no charging stations and no WiFi. In an age where other cafés compete on bandwidth and battery life, Pak Bada built his antithesis, an anti-café for the digital world.

The missing WiFi router is not only removing distraction. It is restoring something researchers have started treating as its own need, separate from loneliness: solitude, chosen and device-free.

None of us in the investor relations team have a psychology or sociology degree. Here is someone who does.

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*Photo credit: Danantara Indonesia Investor Relations team*

Sherry Turkle has spent a career at MIT studying how technology reshapes intimacy, and her argument is simple: people who never practice being alone do not actually learn connection. Instead, they learn only to avoid discomfort.

That instinct holds up under study. Psychologists have repeatedly found that short stretches of chosen, phone-free stillness leave people calmer and less anxious. But the effect depends on the solitude being chosen rather than imposed, and on the devices genuinely being gone.

In Pak Bada's case, *konsepnya sederhana*: he wants people to reclaim sovereignty, or *kedaulatan*, over their own time and their own lives. We come to Kopi Mpat, our phone slowly dies, and something else slowly comes back to life.

## The Harder Case

Pak Bada's discipline is admirable, but he also came from a different time. He grew up before the phone had any claim on him, giving up a habit built in adulthood. His sovereignty is simply a return to his previous world, one in which childhood was not a series of screens and video clips.

Consider the gap inside our own investor relations team. Colleagues born in the early 1990s remember landlines and phone numbers being memorized by necessity. Colleagues born in the early to mid-2000s do not, having grown up their whole lives with smartphones.

For the first group, disconnection is a discipline. For the second, it is a language that was never taught.

Taruna Nusantara shares a location with Pak Bada and Kopi Mpat. But that is far from being the only similarity. In fact, Taruna Nusantara's approach is more radical than a café with no WiFi: it refuses to let something take hold of a mind still being built.

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*Taruna Nusantara's Magelang campus / Photo credit: SMA Taruna Nusantara*

The school's newest rule is called *Pendidikan Dasar Kedisiplinan dan Kepemimpinan*, three months during which incoming students hold no phone at all. After that, it is checked in with the dormitory supervisor and released only on Saturday afternoon through Sunday evening.

During our visit, we watched a few of this year's intake say goodbye to their parents at the gate, phones already handed over, some of them glassy-eyed.

Kuncoro Puji Raharjo, who has taught there since 1990, previously told Kompas that the hardest part is never the coursework, but watching fourteen-year-olds meet homesickness with a three-day-old roommate standing in for the family they cannot call or text.

Whether the trade is worth it is no longer a matter of instinct. In Norway, three years after phones were restricted in 400 middle schools, girls' visits to psychological specialists fell by close to 60 percent, and bullying dropped by roughly 46 percent among girls and 43 percent among boys. In Spain, restricting phones to classroom use alone lifted PISA scores by the equivalent of an extra year of schooling.

Taruna Nusantara has run on that pattern for thirty-five years without needing a study to say so, and it is now expanding from Magelang to five more campuses in places like Cimahi in West Java, Pagar Alam in South Sumatra, and Langowan in North Sulawesi, under the government's Sekolah Garuda program.



*The Balairung Pancasila is the main ceremonial hall of SMA Taruna Nusantara in Magelang / Photo credit: SMA Taruna Nusantara*

## A Pipeline Fix

Step back further, though, and this stops looking like one school's idiosyncrasy.

As we wrote in our debut issue of *Danantara Indonesia Perspectives*, Indonesia's demographic dividend has a closing window, as the fertility rate edges closer to replacement levels today. We have roughly a decade before the dependency ratio turns against us. Only 9.4 percent of Indonesians over 25 hold a bachelor's degree, and our fifteen-year-olds scored 366 on the last PISA math assessment against Vietnam's 469, a similar economy with none of our resource wealth.

STEM graduates make up roughly a fifth of our output against 41 percent in China. This is a pipeline problem, and Sekolah Garuda attempts to fix it at the source.

Danantara Indonesia's own success cannot be separated from this story. A sovereign fund can post strong returns, but it would have little impact if the people, from whom these returns were created for, never improve. Our mandate only matters if Danantara Indonesia's growth and Indonesia's human capital quality move in the same direction, not two separate charts that happen to share a page.

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*Racing toward the finish line in Magelang / Photo credit: Taruna NusantaraRun*

And Danantara Indonesia has a direct lever here: Danantara Investment Management, for one, selects partners based on who commits technology transfer and human capital development alongside capital. We spent a decade telling miners: “No more shipping dirt.” We are now telling investors something similar: do not just ship us capital, ship us capability.

The investors still trading the 2010 version are not early or contrarian. They are just using an old map.

The demographic window is still open. We have the people. Now we need to build a system that deserves them.

Professor Stella Christie, Vice Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology, put it more precisely than we could in "The Pizza is Not the Point," a People at Danantara Indonesia profile we published. Her own research shows mathematical ability in children as young as three months old, and what differs across countries is what gets built around it. "Almost all the results," she told us, "are a product of environment: teaching, the quality of schooling."

This is where schools like Taruna Nusantara come in. Its alumni roster reads like a cross-section of the current government: Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, valedictorian of the class of 1997 and now Coordinating Minister for Infrastructure. Foreign Minister Sugiono is also an alumnus, alongside our own Rachmat Kaimuddin, who recently joined Danantara Indonesia as Managing Director of Investments at the Danantara Development Management Fund.

None of them lived under the phone-free policy, which postdates them by a decade. What they share is the older part of the model: distance, discipline, and merit regardless of what a family could pay.



*Coordinating Minister for Infrastructure Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, in the blue suit, is a Taruna Nusantara graduate / Photo credit: Kementerian Koordinator Bidang Infrastruktur dan Pembangunan Kewilayahan*

Every version of this argument, whether a teenager's first three months in a dormitory, a demographic dividend with a closing window, or a sovereign fund's own mandate, is all linked to the same concept.

#### *Kedaulatan.*

The trade is always the same. Give up what is easy, right now, and buy back control over what happens next.

Sovereignty over a decade, a workforce, or a nation still works the same sovereignty over a Saturday morning does. Just on a different scale.

We have travelled a long way from a wooden deck floating over a pond the color of green tea. But that is exactly where the idea started, and it is where it should end.

## A Modern *Moksa*

In the old traditions of Java and Bali, there is a word for the highest release: *moksa*, the moment a soul is liberated from the cycle entirely, when a sage becomes so complete that he simply vanishes from the world. Sitting on that deck, drinking coffee that got cold because the conversation was better, it struck us that Pak Bada has achieved a modern, minor *moksa*.

He has disappeared from the network. No blue dot marks his location. No algorithm knows what he wants, because what he wants is eight hectares of unpoisoned land, and there is no ad inventory for that.

*"Tiap hari bercocok tanam, slow living. Nggak lihat tetangga, jadi nggak ada yang diirikan."* Every day is spent farming, planting, slow living. Not many neighbors, so there is nothing to envy.

To the machine that catalogues all of us, he is a ghost. And the beautiful joke is this: he has never been more present. He remembers the rain patterns, the names of his plants, the moods of his fish. He is more present than many of us who watch and consume millions of data points every single day, spending hours glued to our screens.



*Photo credit: Danantara Indonesia Investor Relations team*

He has simply forgotten his phone number, choosing ten digits less and an authentic life that is entirely more. The rest of us are the opposite. We remember our numbers, passwords, and streaks, yet we are the ones who have vanished, from the table, from the conversation, from the Saturday morning happening right in front of us.

At Kopi Mpat, there is nowhere to charge your phone. It turns out that was never the thing that needed charging.

*— Magelang, July 2026. Written over a second glass of kopi hitam, phone face-down, battery at 14 percent and falling, sovereignty rising.*

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—Bada

# Did You Know?



*A colonial-era postcard of Mount Tidar / Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons*

In the middle of Magelang, there is a hill only 503 metres high, which the Javanese have spent centuries calling the most important piece of ground on the island.

Mount Tidar is known as *Pakuning Tanah Jawa*: the Nail of Java. The legend holds that Java once refused to sit still. It drifted, restless, on the open sea, until a nail was driven through it to fix the island in place. The head of that nail became the hill.

Look at what has since gathered around it. The Akademi Militer, or Military Academy, trains its officers in Lembah Tidar, the valley at its foot. The Kedu Plain that surrounds it, ringed by the mountains Sumbing and Sundoro to the west and Merbabu and Merapi to the east, was called the Garden of Java for soil so rich the Shailendra kings built Borobudur on it.

A whole island, the story goes, held steady by one fixed point that refused to move.

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

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