

EDITORIAL

Half-hearted Tokyo Olympics

The Tokyo Olympics will go ahead! No more delay, although the world’s largest sporting event has to be scaled down in terms of spectators, because only local people and foreign residents will be allowed to watch the games in-person.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and the International Olympic Organization (IOC) are determined the Tokyo Olympics should run from July 23 to Aug. 8, with the Paralympics following from Aug. 24 to Sept. 5, despite strong opposition from the majority of the Japanese public, who wanted another postponement due to the still raging COVID-19 pandemic.

Anything can still happen as the pandemic remains far from over and the host has a solid reason to retract its decision. But who knows, maybe Japan can invent “technological miracles” to secure the games, described by PM Suga as a “symbol of global solidarity”. But one thing is almost certain: Global enthusiasm will be lacking when the show goes on.

So far, International Olympic Committee (IOC) member nations, including Indonesia, have given lukewarm, if not half-hearted, reactions, as they face their own dilemmas at home. Indonesia has yet to make public its plan for the summer Games, especially regarding the preparation of its athletes.

More than 11,000 athletes from around 200 countries are expected to compete in Tokyo. The Games will cost the host country and the participating nations, because it will be more difficult for them to find sponsors. Not much revenue can be expected from ticket sales either.

As a top-level sporting competition, the upcoming Olympics may not see new records, because the pandemic has disrupted athletes’ training schedules. The one-year delay will also affect their mental readiness. So let’s not expect much fun from the Olympics this time around.

As the host country, Japan has the privilege to feature sports that will allow it to win medals, like surfing, sport climbing, skateboarding, baseball and karate. The Olympics will naturally boost PM Suga’s political popularity.

On Aug. 21, 2016, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike, wearing a light-colored kimono, was about to receive the IOC flag from the Rio de Janeiro Olympic host, when then-Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe stole her show by appearing as the Nintendo game character Super Mario at the closing ceremony. Japan at that time sent a message that it would stun the world with an amazing and extraordinary Olympics in 2020, but then the pandemic struck.

COVID-19 has dealt Japan’s ambition a big blow, but knowing Japanese culture and its superb high-tech achievement, there is still hope that, despite all the restrictions, Japan will not only be able to show off its spectacular technology but also achievements in sports development.

More importantly, holding the Olympics will allow PM Suga to restore trust among nations in the world and reduce tension in East Asia. No doubt, PM Suga has a strong agenda in turning this multi-sports event into a moment for peace.

We all hope the Tokyo Olympics will take place, not just for the interests of Japan, but also for global sports development. They may not be as spectacular as previous Olympic Games, but we appreciate and support Japan’s determination.

True religions teach people to love each other

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Be aware. The media is the best actor in our society to feel whether or not radicalism is creeping in. Even before the bomb attack in Makassar on March 28, radicalism had been spreading in communities.

Radicalism comes from the Latin word “radix”, which means “root”. It is very important for an ideology or religion that their adherents are guided toward the “root of their opinion or faith”, otherwise they will stay only on the surface of true conviction.

But in pursuing extreme changes to society, radicals tend to see everything as black or white.

There have been some religious teachers or supposed religious teachers who indoctrinate their followers and expose them to teachings that they claim to be the only truth. Those religious teachers insist that that is the most effective way to actualize their faith. In fact, the practice has existed for centuries.

Very often, they conceal the economic or political motives behind their supposedly religious teachings. They can be very popular and seek only popularity; they avoid true religious teachings which are generally much deeper and demand more spiritual exercise.

On the other hand, the true religious teachings will guide people, including youths, to deeper and more truthful integration in life between individuals and their social communities. We can learn this from the late former president Abdurrahman “Gus Dur” Wahid, a respectful Nahdlatul Ulama cleric, and from many prominent teachers among us.

Shallow teachings of any ideology could provoke more popular actions in much more simple ways, like hard actions and words. But this would not help people live a deeper faith.

We have to take the long way and need a lot of conversations to get closer to one another and move nearer to the Lord. Very often, we have to help one another, even in contact with people from other religions, to understand truly the will of God.

Conversing with one another, living with one another, believing in one another, having faith in relation with one another, and even praying for one another are ways to approach our loving God and at the same time to build a better religious life.

Killing one another, hating one another, hurting one another are not the way to praise God or actualize “believing in one God”, the first principle of Pancasila, our state ideology. Loving each other and making friends are the better ways for truly religious people.

Does the teacher training curriculum really need revising?

We have spent months on developing teaching materials and implementing them. It turns out that, in the end, our fate is determined by the knowledge test.”

That’s the view expressed by a dejected student enrolled in the Teachers Professional Education (PPG) program, who failed the final test. Since the program was launched by the government for teachers to obtain professional teaching certificates — and government incentives, PPG certification is highly coveted among teachers. Current and aspiring teachers compete to enter the program, and they have to work hard in the course of the program because of the tight schedule and wide curriculum.

At the end of the program, almost half of the students fail the final test.

The disappointment expressed by the student above begs the question as to what has gone wrong with the program. Is its curriculum properly designed to create professional teachers? Why is the failure rate so high? Are Indonesian teachers really facing a problem in becoming professional?

Compared with teachers in other countries, Indonesian professional teachers have a unique definition. That is because the educational circumstances in the country are highly dynamic, if not unpredictable. Everybody knows that the Indonesian curriculum has often changed, as opposed to that of Finland, a country prominent for its high educational standards, which changes the curriculum only every 12 years. Of course, we can argue that Indonesia is beyond comparison with Finland because of distinctive geopolitical situations.

In Indonesia, changes in the curriculum are often influenced by changes in domestic politics. When the president changes, the curriculum follows suit. Even if there is no new national leader, the curriculum still could change if a new education minister assumes office.

As a result of the frequent changes, Indonesian teachers often feel overwhelmed. Especially if the curriculum requires them to be innovative and creative, as is the case with the 2013 curriculum



Testing: A teacher interacts with students at SMPN 26 state junior high school in Surakarta, Central Java, during a trial of face-to-face learning on March 29. Some 25 schools participated in the trial.

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that is currently in force.

Some teachers will motivate themselves to adapt to the changes, but most may resist and stick with the old way of teaching. This resistance is what the PPG deems a key task to solve in order to improve Indonesian teachers.

As a PPG instructor, I initially questioned the design of the PPG curriculum, because I witnessed PPG students spending more time to develop teaching devices such as lesson plans, learning media, student worksheets, teaching materials and evaluation sheets. Those make up about 80 percent of the PPG program. The PPG students work on it and implement it at schools.

Then, I asked myself, does this mean that being a professional teacher in Indonesia only requires skills in developing and revising teaching devices?

However, after years of experience as a PPG instructor, I realized that this is the core of being a professional teacher in Indonesia. Before PPG students develop their teaching devices, they have to study and analyze the given curriculum documents. They are challenged to set aside teacher and student text books provided by the government. Instead, they have to depart from the basic competencies and have to reformulate and reconceptualize the learning indicators and outcomes. They have to dare to say no to the prototype materials provided by the government if they do not suit the specific characteristics of their schools or their students.

This is actually a basic competence an Indonesian professional teacher should have. So, whatever the curriculum looks like, and regardless of how fast it changes, an Indonesian professional teacher has to have the confidence and guts to examine, analyze and adjust the curriculum materials to fit the real conditions they face at school. Such competency is more crucial than ever now that we are facing a pandemic that has forced schools to close.

Furthermore, during the device development workshop, PPG students have to compile a classroom action research (CAR) proposal. What is interesting about the concept of the CAR, which is packaged and discussed during the PPG lecture and teacher training organized by the Tano-to Foundation, is the idea of CAR as a process to improve teachers’ performance on an ongoing basis.

A decarbonization roadmap that we need

Our climate challenge is an energy challenge. But solving our energy challenge requires action that goes well beyond power generation.

Solar and wind have revolutionized our energy system. But with the power sector currently supplying only 20 percent of our energy, simply producing more green electricity cannot get us to net-zero carbon dioxide emissions by mid-century. Nor will converting renewable power into large-scale supplies of green hydrogen be a silver bullet. Our ships, planes, and trains are not configured for it, and the economic incentives are not yet moving in the right direction.

Our energy challenge is also an energy demand problem. Achieving our collective climate ambitions requires rapid and deep transitions in each of the sectors that contribute to global energy demand, including not only power, but also transport, manufacturing, steel, and chemicals. Getting these transitions on track at the required pace implies the complete transformation of our energy infrastructure. To that end, three priorities in particular will be crucial.

First, we need to accelerate the pace of innovation. Recent analysis by the International Energy Agency shows that nearly half of the emission reductions needed to reach net zero by 2050 may have to come from technologies that aren’t yet on the market.

Clean-energy technologies such as solar panels, wind turbines, electric cars, light-emitting diodes, and lithium-ion batteries have made it possible for us to envision a net-zero world in the coming decades. But we need giant leaps in innovation in other clean technologies — some of



Clean energy: A number of wind turbines operate on Pabbaessang hill in Mattirotasi Tasi, Sidrap regency, South Sulawesi. The wind turbines support the government’s efforts to develop renewable energy.

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which are still in the lab — to get us all the way there. This is especially urgent in sectors like steel, cement, chemicals, shipping, and aviation, where emissions are the hardest to reduce and technological solutions are lagging.

The second priority is closer collaboration between government and industry. The private sector is an unparalleled engine of change. It’s where the lion’s share of inventors, entrepreneurs, and investors are, and their contributions will be crucial if the world is to devise and deploy green technologies at the rate required.

At the same time, government action is essential to unleash the full power of business. Left to their own devices, markets won’t bring about the rapid transformation of our global energy system that we need. In many sectors, businesses need strong government policy to enable lower-carbon technologies to flourish. They need government to support early innovation in new technologies, create niche markets that allow them to develop, and then implement effective policies that enable their diffusion — sector by sector.

Lastly, we need greatly enhanced international coordination. In a global system centered on national action, orchestrating the kind of systemic change required in many energy-consuming sectors is a major challenge. National approaches can be highly effective in some areas, especially where governments can pursue decisive policies without hurting domestic producers in sectors like power.

But a rigid national approach works less well in internationally

traded industries, and particularly in harder-to-abate sectors. Here, coordinated cross-border action is essential to drive the rapid adoption of new technologies.

Multilateral institutions have a critical role to play in all these areas. The IEA facilitates collaboration on key energy transition technologies — an effort that involves more than 6,000 experts worldwide, representing nearly 300 public and private organizations located in 55 countries, including many from IEA association countries such as China, India, and Brazil. But with an ever-growing consensus on the need to move toward net-zero emissions, we can and should do more.

Later this year, the IEA will set out the first comprehensive roadmap for the global energy sector, spanning power, transport, industry, and buildings — each of which we need to transform in order to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. By setting out exactly what is needed in each sector, and when, the plan will enable governments and firms to benchmark their progress, making it clear where greater focus is needed.

The next step is turning plans into action. That is why the IEA recently formed a strategic partnership with Mission Possible, a global coalition of more than 400 companies seeking to accelerate the large-scale decarbonization of heavy industry and transport. Our support for this initiative also reflects the IEA’s new focus on bringing together the private sector and governments from the world’s major economies — which must play the coordinating role that only they can.

By focusing on innovation, collaboration, and bold policies, initiatives like these can help the world to meet the climate challenge.