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## **CSIS Commentaries DMRU-053-EN**

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# **“Mudik” in the time of COVID-19: Make it safe, make it effective**

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As of 15 April 2020, we are told COVID-19 is still on the rise in Indonesia. 5,136 people are infected, hospitalized 4,221, and 469 people have died from COVID-19 related causes. Governors in several parts of Indonesia have ordered some measure of limitation on mobility—closing of schools, elimination of public gatherings or limitations on their size. Most places of both formal and informal employment are closed. Urban areas, particularly the greater Jakarta metropolitan area, are now home to hundreds of thousands of individuals, some with families who are ill housed, unemployed, and running out of money for the daily expenses of food and housing. Most of them migrated to the city before COVID-19 turned our lives upside down looking for a better life and prepared to work hard to achieve that.

*Ramadhan*, the fasting month, and *Idulfitri*, which should be the joyous coming together of family and friends to celebrate the end of Ramadhan are approaching and have triggered nervous discussion of the Indonesian tradition of “*mudik*” – the exodus of 2 million adults and children return to their home

towns. This year hundreds of thousands of low- and middle-income people, even the healthy, will feel the burden of COVID-19 as, idle from work, they struggle to pay for housing, food, and clothing. These struggles have fuelled the desire to go home, but current regulations no longer permit such travel, and others, who went home before the regulations were put in place had a rude awakening upon arrival when they were required to self-quarantine for two weeks. Their desire is understandable, but the question has often been raised, “will the relocation of so many people at this time not trigger a spike in COVID-19 infection in the areas receiving these seasonal visits?”

I propose working with these people and local governments to facilitate healthy, productive return to their hometowns.

1. Individuals under 50 prepared to return home and stay for at least 4 months in their home towns would be registered (with family members if married) for a two-step COVID-19 testing process: once at the time of registration, the second time after 14 days of self-quarantine. They also need to give the name and address of a relative at their destination.
2. During the two-week self-quarantine participants in the program would follow an on-line or other basic information training about COVID-19 and how to protect themselves and others from infection.
3. If the 2<sup>nd</sup> COVID-19 test is still negative, the person(s) will be given a “mudik certificate”, a supply of face masks, cash payment from one of several programs (for example *BPJS Ketenagakerjaan*, President’s support program) and a reporting contact at their destination.
4. The receiving local government will be notified of the return of X number of healthy people under the age of 50 and families so that work options could be identified/developed prior to arrival of the returnees. The receiving authorities are allowed to use *Dana Desa*, *Bantuan Usaha Menengah dan Kecil (UMK)* and other sources of funding for innovative and creative work activity for their returning community members.

This should be a win-win situation. For the individuals/ families who are healthy but feeling the impact of COVID-19 in the big city, and for the cities, DKI Jakarta and others, it provides an avenue for the safe, healthy, departure of hundreds of thousands of people.

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