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# **Indonesia: Pramoedya Ananta Toer Centenary Festival to be launched in hometown of Blora on February 6<sup>th</sup>**

Thursday 30 January 2025, by [BALOWSKI James](#), [SHUKRI M Iqbal](#) (Date first published: 22 January 2025).

**A commemoration of “One Century of Pramoedya Ananta Toer” will be held in Blora regency, Central Java on February 6. Pram, as he is known, is a writer from Blora who produced more than 50 works. A number of Pram’s literary works have been translated into 42 languages around the world.**

The Pramoedya Ananta Toer Foundation is working in collaboration with the Garuda People’s Veranda Community to organise #Seabadpram (#ACenturyOfPram). This cross-generation creative worker movement is seeking to revive and disseminate the ideas, enthusiasm and values in Pramoedya’s works to the younger generation throughout 2025.

The movement is planned to be launched at the #Seabadpram Festival in Pramoedya’s hometown of Blora on February 6-8 with a series of events.

Starting with the establishment of a road named Jalan Pramoedya Ananta Toer, it will be followed by a memorial lecture, discussions, a reprint and exhibition of Pramoedya’s books, film and documentary screenings, dramatic readings, theatre performances, and exhibition of statues and sketches, and culminating in a “Child of All Nations” (the title of the

first book in Pramoedya’s Buru quartet) musical concert that will present a number of national musicians.

Cultural observer and historian Hilmar Farid said that Pram is an important figure that should be remembered and that we should draw from his ideas and spirit.

“From Pram’s work and actions, we can draw a lot of relevant insight for today, even for Indonesia in the future.” That is why, the #Seabadpram celebration is an important and strategic step”, he said during a press conference at H.B. Jassin Literary Documentation Centre in Cikini, Central Jakarta, on Tuesday January 21.

Also present at the press conference was Blora Regent Arief Rohman, who expressed his gratitude and said that as a representative of the Blora regency government he was of course very proud and welcomed the kick off of the commemoration by the friends of Pramoedya Ananta Toer which will be held on February 6-8 in Blora.

“So Blora is a city at the eastern end of Central Java, bordering East Java, where Pak [Mr] Pram was born and we want to a good host later. Of course we are looking forward to having ‘Pramists’ in Blora and the series of activities that have already been arranged, we hope this will be a historical event so that maybe those who do not know Blora [will

discover] that Blora really loves cultural arts that are extraordinary", he said.

"The Blora government hopes that Pram lovers can later be present to enliven the event and of course we say thank you Blora which been chosen to host the kick off of these events and of course hopefully the event will be able to take place smoothly and successfully."

"All the ranks of the Blora regency government and all the Blora people are very enthusiastic about this activity and we invite all Pram lovers as well as the lovers of literature and [his] ideas to come to Blora and celebrate a Blora child whose work is not only echoing at the national level but also at the international level", he said.

Pramoedya's daughter Astuti Ananta Toer from the Pramoedya Ananta Toer Foundation said that celebrating Pramoedya was celebrating someone with various sides to his life and actions. Widely known as an author, Pramoedya was also an archiver, historian, thinker, journalist, a national warrior as well as a person who experience injustice.

Not surprisingly, various sorts of people ranging from academics, artists, activists, cultural workers, non-government organisation (NGO) workers, the government, and many more who will take part in celebrating the festival in Blora.

"From the family, we invite everyone, who have read Pram, have been inspired by Pram, know Pram, but also those who don't really know Pram. We hope that the legacy from Pram can be something celebrated by all Indonesian people and international friends", said Astuti.

A similar view was also conveyed by Dolorosa Sinaga, a famous Indonesian sculpture and artist and also a teacher at the Jakarta Art Institute.

"Since September 2024, we have gathered to discuss the celebration of this century of Pramoedya. There are activists, writers, artists, film workers, musicians, etc. who have continued to meet and unite, to celebrate this. We see this as not just a celebration or event, but we see it as a movement", said Ibu [Mother] Dolo, who is known for her works of sculpture with many humanitarian themes and struggles.

### **Artists from Jakarta**

The celebration of the "One Century of Pramoedya Ananta Toer" festival will also present artists from Jakarta as well as Blora, along with thinkers and academics.

One of the artists who will enliven the festival is Happy Salma, a film actor and theatre worker who will present a monologue as a teaser for the big performances that will be held this year.

"Me personally as well as the Titi Mangsa Foundation are very happy to be involved in this activity. I will present a short monologue, around 20-30 minutes, which is taken from or originates from one of Pram's works."

"This opportunity is also an interesting cooperation and collaboration with friends in Blora, because there will also be a reading of Pram letters by junior high school students from Blora", Salma said at the press conference.

The celebration of the #Seabadpram movement and the Pramoedya festival in Blora as a kick-off event, will take place throughout this year and is an event that should be attended and awaited. All information, registration and official publications by the #SeAbadPram movement and festival will be disseminated through the official Instagram channel @seabadpram.

Throughout 2025, the #Seabadpram movement is scheduled to hold a number of events in order to enliven one century Pramoedya Ananta Toer, including:

1. A reprinting of Pramoedya's selected works
2. The launch of the biographical website and archive repository seabadpram.com;
3. Commemorative lectures,
4. A festival film and documentary on Pramoedya
5. An exhibition of sketches and statues of Pramoedya's face
6. A monolog presentation of "A Closing Flower of the Century" together with the Titimangsa Foundation
7. A dramatic reading of Pramoedya's letters
8. An exhibition of Pramoedya's archives
9. A literary residency on Buru Island
10. A seminar on Pramoedya thoughts and ideas and the Pramoedya Award;
11. A Pramoedya essay competition
12. A Pramoedya reading group

### **Pramoedya Ananta Toer's life at a glance**

Born as the eldest son of a nationalist teacher's family in Blora on February 6, 1925, Pramoedya Ananta Toer received a basic education at the Blora Boedi Ortumo Institute led by his father, Mastoer Imam Badjoeri.

He continued his education at the Vakschool Radio in Surabaya, but did not have time to receive a graduation diploma following the collapse of the Dutch East Indies colonial power and the entry of the Japanese occupation forces.

In June 1942, Pramoedya migrated to Jakarta and worked as a typist for the DOMEI news agency while continuing his secondary education at Taman Madya high school.

After the proclamation of independence in August 1945, Pramoedya joined the Siliwangi Division VI regiment which was serving in the Bekasi area near Jakarta.

Pramoedya's choice to support Indonesian independence was rewarded with a prison sentence in Bukit Duri between July 23, 1947 to December 18, 1949.

It was behind these iron bars that Pramoedya first two novels, "The Hunt" and the "guerrilla family", were written. In 1950, Pramoedya was appointed as modern Indonesian literature editor at the Balai Pustaka.

After resigning from the Balai Pustaka, Pramoedya then worked as a full-time-time author, translator and freelance contributor for various newspapers and magazines.

His work as a new face in Indonesian literature led Pramoedya to various achievements, ranging from a residency program in the Netherlands funded by the Stichting voor Culturele Samenwerken (Sticusa) in 1953, an invitation to the commemoration of Lu Hsun's death from the People's Republic of China in 1956, to leading the Indonesian delegation at the Asia-Africa Authors Conference in Tashkent in 1957.

In August 1960, Pramoedya was arrested and jailed for one year without trial for publishing the book "The Chinese in Indonesia" (Hoakiau in Indonesia).

This book was considered subversive by the authorities at that time because it displayed a defence of

the position of Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent who had been boxed into a corner by the racist Government Regulation Number 10/1959.

After being released, Pramoedya accepted an offer to become an editor of the cultural column of the Eastern Star newspaper and teach Indonesian literature and modern history at the University of Res Publica, the Sedjarah Ranggawarsita Academy and the Multatuli Academy of Literature.

His works in the form of a biography "Just Call me Kartini" (Panggil Aku Kartini Sadj), the continued stories "Larasati" and the "Girl from the Coast" (Gadis Pantai), polemics and continued essays through to scientific papers were regularly published in the cultural column of the Lentera (Torch) that Pramoedya wrote with author Rukiah Kertapati.

After the 30 September Movement (G30S) was defeated, Pramoedya was arrested during a mass assault on his home on October 13, 1965. Eight unfinished manuscripts were also destroyed and burned together with the collection of five thousand books in his personal library.

Over the next four years, Pramoedya was detained at several different locations (Salemba prison, Tangerang and Nusa Kambangan) before departing on the ship "ADRI XV" with 800 other political prisoners to Buru Island on August 16, 1969.

Forced labour to clear forests with improvised equipment, establishing rice fields and building roads and bridges under the threat of the gun became Pramoedya daily work as a political prisoner and he had to obtain permission from the commander of the Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order (Kopkamtib), General. Soemitro, in order to return to the work of writing.

With limitations on writing implements and paper supplies, Pramoedya re-wrote the oral stories that he had been telling to his fellow prisoners before going to sleep.

He gave birth to no less than eight manuscripts under these limitations, including "This Earth of Mankind" (Bumi Manusia), "Child of All Nations" (Anak Semua Bangsa), "Footsteps" (Jejak Langkah), "Arok of Java" (Arok Dedes), "Eye of the Vortex" (Mata Pusaran), "The Reverse Flow" (Arus Balik), "Mangir", "On the Mud" (Di Atas Lumpur) and the documentation

"Adolescent Resistance under Grip of the Military (Perawan Remaja dalam Cengkeraman Militer).

And he did not just write novels, Pramoedya used the permission to write to send letters to his family and record the death of political prisoners from the 23 prisoner units on Buru Island.

Pramoedya received a statement declaring that he was not involved in the G30S on November 12, 1979, and returned to the arms of his family on December 21, 1979, after being separated for 14 years.

He reembarked on his writing that had been left in a vacuum by establishing the publishing company Hasta Mitra together with Hasjim Rachman and Joesoef Isak, and publishing "This Earth of Mankind" for the first time in August 1980.

A lively welcome to the publication of the book was marked by a very high reader interest and it was reprinted five times in less than one year. However on April 29, 1981, the Attorney General's Office of the Republic of Indonesia issued a ban on "This Earth of Mankind" and the

sequel "Children of all Nations" because it was considered to "disseminate Marxist-Leninist" ideas.

Some of the copies of the two books are withdrawn from circulation and destroyed, while others are

duplicated and sold secretly. Fortunately, "This Earth of Mankind" and "Children of all Nations" was translated into English and brought Pramoedya's name onto the world literary stage.

Pramoedya accepted the fact that due to limited freedoms, and because he was under city arrest and a prisoner of the state, he could not defend himself and did not have the right to answer to the accusations directed at him.

Books published by Hasta Mitra are repeatedly banned and censored, although at the same time, Pramoedya's name repeatedly entered the short list of Nobel award recipients for literature from the Swedish academy.

It was only in 1995 that Pramoedya received the Ramon Magsaysay award for journalism, literature and creative communication because of his works that contributed to the enlightenment of the Indonesian people about the period of national revival.

Pramoedya's civil rights as an Indonesian citizen were restored in 1999 after enduring at least 34 years of detention, deprivation of freedom and the censorship of his works. He also received various awards from home and abroad for his works and courage. (iqs)

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**P.S.**

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*Translated by James Balowski. Slightly abridged due to repetition.*