

Students remember but detached from 1998 tragedy

JAKPOST - 14/05/18

The Jakarta Post
JAKARTA

Two decades have passed since four Trisakti University students were shot during a non violent protest against the Soeharto administration.

Today, the university students still remember the tragedy, but through a very different lens.

Ryan Israyudin, the university's student body president, said student movements today were usually underestimated and disregarded.

"We are outnumbered by mass organizations that usually have a lot of people during their protests," Ryan, a 21-year-old industrial technology major, told *The Jakarta Post* on Saturday.

On May 12th, 1998, four Trisakti University students, Elang Mulia Lesmana, Heri Hertanto, Hafidin Royan and Hendriawan Sie, were killed by unidentified gunmen during a demonstration.

The death of the four unarmed students on May 12 served as a rallying cry that drove thousands of students to occupy the House of Representatives building in Central Jakarta. Soeharto resigned on May 21, 1998.

At the campus, memories of the tragedy live on and students often participate in annual commemorations or visit Trisakti Museum, located at the university campus in Grogol, West Jakarta. The museum was opened in 1999.

Ryan said the decreased significance of student movements was probably the consequence of an improved democracy and the existence of social media, which had revolutionized how people express themselves.

Trisakti students remember 1998 shooting of four seniors

Messages behind student movements often lost

"Voicing one's opinion can now be done through social media and it could easily become viral. [Opinions] are short-lived but could also harm one's reputation," he said.

Ryan cited as an example an incident in which University of Indonesia student body chief Zaadit Taqwa raised a yellow card in an act of protest against President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo during a seminar that the President had attended at the university campus in Depok, West Java.

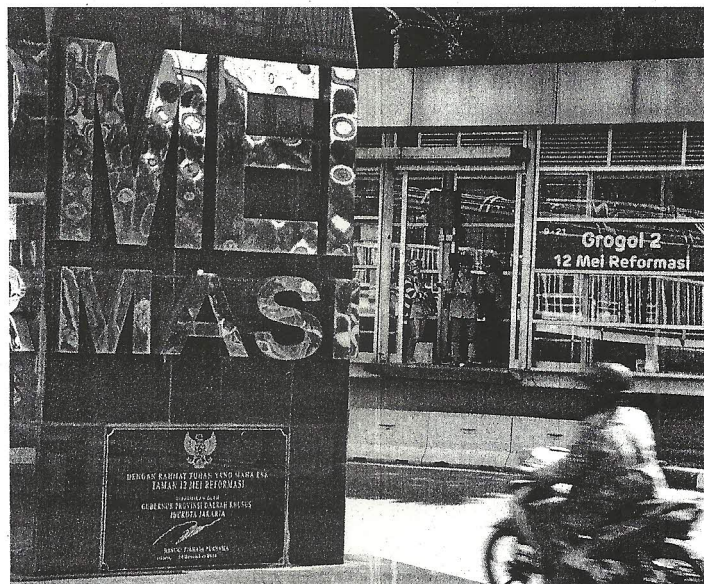
Zaadit criticized the President over malnutrition in Papua and the appointment of police and military members as regional heads.

"People criticized Zaadit's character and method of protest instead of listening to his message," said Ryan.

Sergio Immanuel, 22, a law student of Trisakti University, said the current generation of university students was aware of the May 1998 student protests but could not relate to the movement.

He urged students to voice their aspirations in their own unique ways because student protests did not have the same impact as those from 20 years ago.

"Demonstrations are not the only way to voice our opinion. For example, we could conduct our own independent study about something and, along with our recommendations, forward it to



JP/P.J.LEO

Not forgotten: A motorcyclist rides past a Transjakarta bus shelter called 12 Mei Reformasi, which has a statue standing across from it. Located between Jl. Kyai Tapa and Jl. S. Parman in West Jakarta, the statue has been erected to memorialize four Trisakti University students who lost their lives in shootings during the May 1998 riots.

the government so it can have a discussion with us," Sergio said.

An economics student, Yosua Putra Andika, 18, said students needed to speak out against injustices.

"What I know about the 1998 shootings is that four of our seniors died during the May 1998 student protests. That is inspiration for students, who must keep voicing the common people's hopes and take their side," Yosua said.

"Personally, I don't feel much connection with the 1998 shootings. However, I heard stories about the protests from my seniors and I felt a bit upset [about

how authorities treated protesters]," another economics student, Mila Widiandini, 18, said.

This year, Trisakti University students held a candlelight vigil at May 12 Reformation Park on Jl. Kyai Tapa and its surrounding areas in West Jakarta on Friday night and a flag ceremony attended by university staff members and students on Saturday morning to commemorate the 1998 shootings.

On Monday, Trisakti University students plan to march from the Arjuna Wijaya chariot statue in Central Jakarta to the front of Merdeka Palace to commemorate the shootings. (ami)