

## Judges should acquit defendants in Novel case to restart investigation: Busyro

Moch. Fiqih Prawira Adjic

### **The Jakarta Post/Jakarta**

Former Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) chairman Busyro Muqoddas has called on the judges at the North Jakarta District Court to clear the alleged attackers of graft buster Novel Baswedan of wrongdoing so that a new investigation can begin.

"Hopefully, the panel of judges will acquit [the defendants] so a new investigation can be carried out," he said in a virtual discussion on Novel's case held by Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW) on Friday.

Busyro said the new inquisition would hopefully reveal the real culprits and masterminds behind the case. He cited the murder case of a journalist of Yogyakarta local daily newspaper Bernas during the New Order era.

The journalist, Fuad Muhammad Syafruddin, was killed in August 1996 shortly after writing a story on several graft practices committed by the Bantul administration in the province.

Dwi Sumaji, the sole suspect arrested by the police, allegedly was forced to admit his involvement in the murder. He was later freed of all charges by the Bantul District Court in 1997 due to a lack of evidence.

"The real culprit will not be revealed unless the judges free the defendants with their conscience," Busyro, who led the antigraft agency from 2011 to 2015, said.

"If I were the judge, I would use my judge reasoning in addition to my legal reasoning and intuition," he continued.

If the judge were to acquit the defendants of all charges, Busyro suggested that President Joko

"Jokowi" Widodo form an independent fact-finding team to reopen the new investigation instead of handing it over to the police again.

State prosecutors had previously demanded a one-year prison sentence against the defendants, police personnel Chief Brig. Ronny Bugis and Brig. Rahmat Kadir Mahulette. The defendants allegedly attacked Novel with sulfuric acid, resulting in serious damage to Novel's eyes.

The light sentence demands had sparked public outcry questioning the prosecutors' arguments that the defendants "accidentally" threw the acid into Novel's face in April 2017.

Activists and members of the public also raised suspicions that the two policemen were merely scapegoated, with the mastermind still at large.

Novel had tweeted through his Twitter account, *@nazaqist-ha*, that the defendants should be released "rather than making things up", expressing his disbelief that the accused were the real culprits.

Meanwhile, former KPK commissioners have urged the anti-graft body to take on the prosecution of the alleged attackers of senior investigator Novel Baswedan after the current prosecution demanded notably light sentences for the defendants.

Abraham Samad, who led the antigraft body between 2011 and 2015, criticized current KPK chairman Firlil Bahuri for his recent statement saying the ongoing legal process should be respected.

The former chairman said KPK leaders should take responsibility and act on the case as the acid attack was not simply a personal at-

tack against Novel.

"This was an attack against the corruption eradication agenda as well as the institution itself," Abraham said during a discussion on Friday.

He urged current KPK commissioners to pressure the government to address the acid attack case more seriously, citing several suspicious occurrences during the investigation. Abraham pointed out that the police had taken three years to find the suspects, even though both suspects were active police officers.

Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras) coordinator Yati Andriyani, who is also part of Novel's legal team, said investigators had not summoned Novel's three neighbors, who were key witnesses in the case.

They said they had witnessed

people preparing a liquid before throwing it on Novel and scouting around Novel's house prior to the attack.

Yati also noted the fact that the defendants' legal team was led by National Police law division head Insp. Gen. Rudy Heriyanto Adi Nugroho, who served as the Jakarta Police's general crime division head during the investigation of the acid attack in April 2017.

"He investigated the case, but now he is acting as the defendant's legal representative. The conflict of interest is obvious," said Yati.

She said the KPK should open an obstruction of justice case against the defendants, as the National Commission on Human Rights' (Komnas HAM) 2018 investigation concluded that the attack was related to Novel's work as KPK investigator.