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Migrant Workers and Media: Indonesia's Case

Kartini was a migrant worker from Indonesia who was punished through death by Fujairah Court, Union Arab Emirate, February 2000, charged with making sexual relations out of married. Strong public pressures and media support made her released and returned to Indonesia on May 5, 2000.

Overview of Recent Indonesian Migrant Workers

Since 1980s, Indonesian government has been making program of exporting migrant workers overseas as one of strategic ways to overcome the overabundant labor force. The aim of this program is to cope with underemployment, widen field of work and increase foreign exchange.

Actually the history of Indonesian migrant dates back to colonial era when the Dutch colonial government sent its labors to Suriname or other parts of Asia that were colonized by European countries. At the beginning of Indonesian independence, we had not seen phenomena of exporting migrant worker overseas significantly. But since the New Order held power for 20 years (1986) this phenomena could attract various parties either those concerned with de-humanization or those who just saw it as business opportunity.

Description of Last Situation of Indonesian Migrant Workers as follow:

- Data of Indonesian Worker Department 1994-1999 indicates that there are 1,461,236 Indonesian migrant working overseas.
- It is predicted that about three million migrant workers do not have any formal document.
- 70% of Indonesian migrant working overseas consist of women labor or about 1,021,103 persons.
- The successive destination countries receiving Indonesian migrant, since the biggest number to the smaller one are Middle East (Saudi

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1 Peralaganan Buruh Migran Indonesia/Rusdi Tagaroa & Encop Sofia, Mataram, Nusa Tenggara Barat: Yayasan Koskata, 1999 p.9
Arabia), Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong, Brunei, and Korea.

- Type of work that they do, at the informal sector is housemaid work, and at the formal sector they work in the factories, companies, industries, hotels, hospitals, and plantations.

It is predicted that the number of Indonesian underemployment at the end of 2000 amounts to 36 million persons\(^2\), where as the economic growth is about 2% a year. Worker Department has targeted to send 2,800,000 migrants to many countries between 1999-2004. For rural society, the opportunity to work overseas is the only alternative to solve the problem of poverty\(^3\).

This condition is not backed with instrument for protection on migrant worker such as: (1) Non-ratified UN Convention 1990 for Protection on Migrant Workers and Their Families (2) No bilateral agreement between Indonesia and receiving countries of Indonesian migrant (except Malaysia & Kuwait) and (3) No national bills that rule mechanism of migrant recruitment and protection.

Due to non-existing protection brings about lots of violations against migrant worker’s rights. The problems that are Migrants encountering ranging over (1) recruitment process up to departure, (2) condition in the work place, (3) repatriation process to their home village.

Increasing migration trend along with the downfall of Indonesian economy and the unavailable protection of Indonesian migrants causing violation against their rights is series problems need improving. Media is one of the changing tools of the policy. The role of media is means to build awareness either at the state level (policy change) or society, as well as migrant community.

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\(^2\) Business News, 14 Juni 2000

\(^3\) The majority of migrant workers are come from villages with farm land as the only one of their occupation. The overview of crisis’s impact to migrant workers see “Krisis yang Menghempas Nasib Buruh Migran” Jurnal Analisis Sosial Vol 4, No 2 Mei 1999 oleh Yuniyanti Chuzafah.
Coverage by Media

To present the short description about situation of media coverage on migrant worker, we observed the media news during last six months (January-June 2000), covered by Kompas, Suara Pembaharuan, Republika, Bisnis Indonesia, Business News, Jakarta Post, Pikiran Rakyat, Suara Karya, Rakyat Merdeka and Neraca. The number of news on migrant worker is as follow:

<table>
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<th>Month</th>
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<td>January</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>92</td>
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<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>June</td>
<td>46</td>
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During the last six months, the coverage of migrant worker appeared weekly, even it was issued almost everyday. The number of coverage is 40 news on the average of a month. The lowest number of coverage took place in January or (15 news) and the highest one occurred in March (92 news). The average number above is much supported by extremely high number happening in March, then it is followed by April and June. When we observe in the normal condition, the media will only cover about 15-20 news a month.

The number of news coverage in mass media can be clarified by observing the important moments or events taking place monthly. The jump of news coverage in March (92 news) took place in relation with Kartini's case, a woman migrant who was threatened to death sentence with stone throw. Afterwards Indonesia celebrates Kartini Day on 21 Aprils. For Indonesian people Kartini is a woman hero considered having great merit in the struggle for gender equality. While in June migrant community is reminded by Warni's incident, a woman migrant worker who was sentenced of decapitation in Arab Saudi. The further news of Warni during in Jail was ever neglected from media, government and NGO's attention. Only when the decapitation was executed without informing Indonesian Embassy in Arab Saudi (KBRI) all parties were shocked. In view of great number of victims due to decapitation punishment experienced by Indonesian migrants in Arab
Saudi, SP (Women Solidarity for Human Rights) carried out demonstration to liberate migrant worker from death sentence⁵.

**Case Of Kartini**

Kartini's Case is one of the interesting affair, since the threat of death sentence with stone throw imposed to her is considered inhuman. Due to advocacy conducted by many NGOs as well as strongly mass media support in Indonesia made Kartini free from the stone throw punishment and she came back to Indonesia. I am going to describe little on this case.

Kartini is a housewife with having two children. Her husband is a poor agricultural labor in a small village in Karawang with receiving income Rp 5,000,00 a day. This amount is of course unavailable to feed the family. That is why she departed to Uni Emirad Arab in October 1998 to work.

The case of Kartini appeared in the local newspaper in Jakarta and Kualalumpur that cited from AFP its source on 28 February 2000. The news included a woman migrant worker from Indonesia named Kartini whom had been sentenced to death with stone throw by Fujairah Court, Uni Emirad Arab after having been charged of making sexual relation with Indian man outside marriage.

This news drew quite a few of public attention in Indonesian. Various parties needed Kartini to be set free. The first advocacy that SP committed was to make a joint statement of standpoint together with some activists who were participating in a meeting on "Re-departure, Forced Arrival, and Reintegration Program" organized by Curam, Malaysia on 27 February 2000 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This statement contained a demand in order that Indonesian government released Kartini from the punishment.

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⁴ Manpower Replacement division in Manpower department, Din Syamsudin dari dirjen binopenta, said that there are 52 Indonesia migrant workers who sentenced decapitation in various countries included Warm (Antara News, 20 June 2000)

⁵ Migrant action held in front of Arab Saudi Embassy dan Foreigner Affair Ministry 26th June 2000
Further Advocacy Conducted by S P:

- Mobilizing societal solidarity, especially inhabitants of Kartini's village. SP carried out investigation in the village where Kartini lives in, by collecting data and information from her family and society in the surroundings from 1-6 March 2000. Formerly the villagers did not care that case and they tended to blame Kartini due to the charge of making sexual relation with a man outside of marriage as published in the newspaper. After having been an intensive dialog among the villagers, especially women migrant workers who underwent sexual violence in Saudi Arabia their empathy to Kartini's sorrow came up. A mass action appeared in front of Union Arab Emirate, Jakarta on 8 March 2000.

- Making lobbying Indonesian government via State Minister of Women Empowerment, Khofifah Indar Parawangsa. We asked for Khofifah who was following the arrangement prior Beijing Conference + 5 in New York on 3-5 March 2000 to hold lobbying with UEA delegation in order to free Kartini from the punishment.

- Urging the government to establish a team having a task to investigate Kartini's affair to get exact information what was actually taking place. Finally the team was formed consisting of The Director General Binapenta Training and Exporting Migrant Worker) Din Syamsudin, Kowani (Coalition of Indonesian Women), Mrs. Hj. Sumarti W. Djatmiko, and Solidaritas Perempuan (Women's Solidarity for Human Rights), Tati Krisnawati to investigate directly in Fujairah on 6-9 March 2000. The team made a contact with the parties related to Kartini's affair in Uni Emirat Arab such as Public Prosecutor and the institution, Kartini, the judges who judged Kartini and the Chief of Fujairah Court, Indonesian Ambassador in Union Arab Emirate and the new lawyer of Kartini.

- Carrying out action on 8 March 2000 coinciding with International Women's Day in front of Uni Emirat Arab Embassy, in Jakarta. The action was conducted by more or less 400 migrant workers and women groups from Jakarta to demand that the court in Fajariah must hold fair trial against Kartini by providing interpreter and lawyer as well as addressing information to Indonesian society concerning with the trial process underwent by Kartini.
All support to release Kartini was widely covered by mass media (printed and electronic media). Kartini who was formerly frustrated and hopeless with losing spirit of life changed different and she wanted to get out from stone throw punishment. She got her desire to be free and survive after knowing the widely public support to her. Finally she disclosed her testimony in the court that Sulaiman had raped her. She braved to express her testimony after reading some clippings of her news issued by Indonesian press containing the support to release her from death sentence threat. Two months and a half after mass media published her case for the first time, Kartini was set free and she came back to Indonesia on 5 May 2000. This case indicated that cooperation of all parties, including mass media managed to release a migrant worker from death sentence threat.

News Material

Based on this situation we can see that migrant issue is not the issue drawing attention when we compare with economic or political affair such as the minister change in Gus Dur cabinet, conflict of violence in some regions (Ambon, Aceh, Poso, Papua) and Suharto corruption.

Issue of migrant worker is covered by mass media when NGOs conducted advocacy on certain cases or exploiting the existing moment like International Women Day, Kartini Day etc.

The media coverage is concerned with:
1. Violation against migrant rights (80%).
2. The government policy (10%).
3. Analysis of migrant situation at national level and that of in some countries (10%).

And from the eleven media above, just one media (Kompas) who coverage analysis about migrant workers. Almost every month there is one migrant workers issues coverage in reasonable space, such as Warni's or Kartini's cases.
By observing the news coverage of migrant worker through mass media we can see two patterns of rising issue of migrant worker in Indonesia. Firstly, NGO publishes its fact-finding that is covered by media. Secondly, media previously informs the fact, then NGOs campaign for the issue in the form of advocacy. Thus NGOs popularize the fact or issue by conducting various actions since launching demonstration on the streets to public hearing.

Media itself describes the problem of migrant worker is very linear and black-white. For instance, the success or fortune is compared with calamity, such as five Indonesian women migrants who have recently been raped during working oversea. A media published the news under the title 'Ingin raup ringgit, noda yang didapat' (Wanted to earn money, disgrace to get)⁶. We can read quite clearly that the thing in comparison in the news coverage is between "ringgit" (money/fortune) and disgrace (misfortune). Another news such as 'TKI, Yang Sukses dan Yang Malang' (Indonesia Migrant Workers, Who successes and unfortunates).

The real problem of migrant worker is seldom published with clear description by positioning all elements related with issue of migrant since the migrant worker itself as subject and object all at once, state, PJTKI (Consortium of Companies Exporting Indonesian Migrant Workers), and other groups of communities in accord with their role, to form a complete description of migrant issue.

The problem of migrant is related with global issue. Economic equality between exporting and receiving countries is an appealing factor for Indonesian migrant and this is seldom published by mass media.

Media Role

There are three groups regarding with the issue of Indonesian migrant worker that need information in order to change into better situation in resolving their problems, namely migrant community, state and the society.

Migrant community consists of migrants themselves and their families. Usually they live in the rural area and most of them earn living in the farm

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⁶ "Ingin raup ringgit, noda yang didapat", Kompas 6 Agustus 2000
area as farmers, peasants or farmer labors, and the others are unemployment with low-level-education. Towards this community we wish mass media becoming a tool that makes migrant community critical in viewing the situation oppressing them, so that they make efforts to change their fate.

At the state level, we expect media to become means of encouraging the government to change the policy to protect Indonesian migrant worker such as: ratification conventions (UN, ILO or other conventions related migrant workers issues), bilateral agreement, and national bills.
Whereas, at the societal level, we wish media to be able to give information and perspective of migrant workers, so that minimally the society will present their empathy to the case of migrant worker, and maximally they can pressure the government or other related party to change the poor condition of migrant into a better one.

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