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### **Indonesian Labor Migrants in Malaysia: A Study from China**

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# **Indonesian Labor Migrants in Malaysia: A Study from China**

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# Indonesian Labor Migrants in Malaysia: A Study from China

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## Introduction

Malaysia is now a major receiving country with estimated over 2 million migrant workers. Such large inflow was caused by scarcity of jobs in plantation, construction and domestic growth. Migrant workers come mostly from Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines. A large number of them are in irregular situation. A Malaysian official report released by ministry of Finance in 1997 stated that there were at least 1.7 million foreign workers in the country, counting about 1 million unregistered workers. This number accounted for 20-25% the total number of labor force in Malaysia and are largely unskilled and semi-skilled workers. The number of registered foreign unskilled and semi-skilled workers increased dramatically at the start of the 1990s and reached 532,000 in 1993 and 1,472,000 in 1997 (see Table 1). As labor demand in the economy stagnated due to the Asian economic crisis and the management policy for foreign workers was changed accordingly, the number of registered foreign workers declined thereafter to 769,000 in early 2002. According to 2000 Population Census of Malaysia, non-Malaysian citizens had increased to 1384,774 and raised their percentage in total population to 5.7%. Government and research institutions have estimated the existence of a considerably greater number of foreign workers in reality than is shown in the population census. However, somewhere between 500,000 and 1,000,000 illegal workers allegedly exist in the country in addition to registered workers. In any event, there is no doubt that

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Malaysia is one of the countries with a large number of foreign workers and that her economy is highly dependent on foreign workers (Watanabe, 2003). At the same time, its neighbor country, Indonesia, has become one of the world's major sources of unskilled labor migrants. The bulk of Indonesian migrant workers regard Malaysia as major destination of migration from 1990s. It is estimated that 83 percent of total migrant workers in Malaysia are Indonesian (Kaur, 2004). It is not possible to give accurate figures of migrant worker from Indonesia to Malaysia because of: (1) Malaysia does not make public data on migration; (2) the bulk of illegal migrants exist; (3) estimates of the numbers involved in the movement vary considerably.

Labor migration has been the trend of globalization and has made multi-dimensional influences on economy, society and politics as well as on receiving and sending countries of labor migrants and bilateral or regional relations. This paper will focus on analyzing the features, reasons of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia and its impact on bilateral relation.

**Table 1      Estimates of legal migrant workers in Malaysia: semi-skilled and unskilled workers**

	Malaysia	Peninsula	Sabah	Sarawak
1993.7-12	532,732	414,336,	100,000	18,387
1994	642,057	515,983	100,000	26,074
1995	726,689	576,441	120,719	29,529
1996	745,239	586,796	121,144	37,299
1997	1,471,652	1,190,437	226,565	54,643
1998	1,127,652	789,684	283,968	54,000
1999	897,705	680,846	162,269	54,590
2000	799,685	632,720	75,232	91,733
2001.7	807,984	618,946	99,281	88,120
2002.1	769,566	-	-	-

Source: Kassim (2002) for 1993-2001, and Malaysia, Department of immigration for 2002.

## **Brief Review of Indonesian Labor Migration to Malaysia**

Indonesian labor migration to Malaysia has been an historical and on –going process. The second half of the nineteenth century was marked by trade liberalization in Europe and Southeast Asian states became colonies, protectorates or part of the informal empire of European powers. After 1870 the British assumed control over the whole of the Malay peninsula by bringing the Malay States under formal protectorate status between 1874 and 1914. At the same time, the Dutch took control over most of the island realm of the Malay Archipelago (Kaur, 2004). Malaysia was integrated into world commodity and capital markets, became the provider of resources for its colonizer (suzerain) and began to be shortage of labor workers. The Malay administration thus sourced labor from outside countries including India and China. Javanese was the third migrant labor stream which reflected the historical links in the Malay world. This was the first time that Malaysia was confronted with the problem of multi-ethnicity (Mantra, 1998). During the colonial period, a liberal immigration policy was adopted, but the British viewed and treated Javanese migrants different from the other migrants from India and China since they were regarded as origination from the same racial stock as the Malays. A pattern of differential treatment for migrants based on ethnicity was thus established, which was to have major implications for labor migration into Malaya after independence in 1957. The flow of Indonesian migrant workers to the Malaysian Peninsula experienced a sharp increase in the 1930s. The results of the 1950 Malaysian population census indicated that there were 189,450 people born in the Island of Java, 62,200 people originated from South Kalimantan, 26,300 people from Sumatra, 24,000 people from the Island of Bawean (East Java), and 7,000 people from Sulawesi (Hugo, 1993).

Movement of Indonesian migrant workers to Malaysia declined during the War and also during the period of the confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia. However, it increased again after the relationship between the Indonesian government and Malaysian Kingdom normalized (Mantra, 1998). From 1970s, Indonesian labor migration to Malaysia took place again, following the implementation of the New Economic Policy. The New Economic Policy, emphasizing public sector expansion and export-oriented industrialization, fostered the rural-urban migration and urban job-orientation of many Malays, thus creating labor shortage in certain sectors such as construction industry, low-paid service and rural area. The Malaysian government thus pursued a proactive policy to recruit foreign migrant workers, mainly from Indonesia but also from Bangladesh, Myanmar and the Philippines. Besides official recruitment, much migration to Malaysia is clandestine. Mid-1980 estimates of Indonesians in Peninsula Malaysia ranged between 200,000 and 700,000(ESCAP, 1985; Hugo, 1988). This inflow was relatively unrestricted by the Malaysian government before Asian finance crisis because of its importance for Malaysia's economic development, as advocated by the Federal Land Development Authority and Malaysian employers association. Indonesian labor migrants were also considered less threatening to the volatile ethnic and political balance than Chinese and Indians (Spaan, Naerssen and Kohl, 2002). Therefore, large-scale labor migration from Indonesia to Malaysia has continued up to the present and has been an ongoing process, following increasing clandestine migrants.

## Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia: General Features

The mobility of people from Indonesia to other countries constitutes the important part of international migration in past several decades. Indonesia characterized as a sending country of labor migrants and the number of labor migrants has been increasing as time goes by. The Indonesian government have perceived labor export as a valuable means of earning foreign exchange and solved domestic unemployment. Based on a report issued by the Department of Manpower (Depnaker RI 1994), prior to the early program of Indonesian development, Indonesia had actively sent its workers to various countries. In the beginning, the number was relatively small in comparison with other countries such as the Philippines, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka, but later, the figure increased rapidly. Table 2 shows that by the third repelita the number of Indonesian migrant workers working abroad was 96, 410. At the end of Repelita IV the figure had reached 292,262 workers. In other words during 2 Repelitas the number of Indonesian migrant workers working abroad had doubled. During Repelita V the figure had reached 652,272. This figure actually was far smaller than it appears because it did not include workers who migrated illegally (Nasution, 2000).

**Table 2 Overseas Indonesian Workers Since Repelita I - Repelita VI**

Repelita	Period	(N)
Repelita I	1969-1974	5,624
Repelita II	1974-1979	17,042
Repelita III	1979-1984	96,410
Repelita IV	1984-1989	292,262
Repelita V	1989-1994	652,272
Repelita VI	1994-1999	1461,236
Total		2524,846

Source: Indonesian Manpower Department, Directorate General of Overseas Labour, *The Development of Export Labour Program in Repelita IV and V*, 1994.

Countries like Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Brunei Darussalam, Taiwan and South Korea constitute the main destination areas of most Indonesian migrants, with Malaysia and Saudi Arabia attracting the largest number (table 3 and 4). According to Kompas figures, up to 1997/1998, about 900,000 Indonesian migrant workers were recorded (see table 3). A thorough examination reveals that men dominated migration to Malaysia, whereas women were more numerous among those going to Saudi Arabia. This aspect is closely related to the unique characteristics of the demand for labour or the type of labour demanded in each of those countries (Keban, 2000).

**Table 3      The Settlement of Indonesian Workers Abroad up to 1997/1998**

Country	Male	Female	Total
Saudi Arabia	24,406	295,038	319,444
Malaysia	220,993	187,218	408,211
Singapore	20,853	65,355	86,208
United Arab Emirates	626	19,044	19,630
Hong Kong	443	10,513	10,956
Brunei Darussalam	1,134	5,205	6,339
Taiwan	17,598	4,958	22,556
South Korea	22,266	4,012	26,278
Total	308,319	591,303	899,442

Source: *Kompas*, Monday 5 Jan 1998.



**Table 4 Overseas Indonesian Workers, Repelita IV-V (Nasution, 2000)**

Destination	Repelita IV (1984-1989)		Repelita V (1989-1994)	
Countries	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
Australia	7	0.0024	213	0.0326
Holland	4,357	1.4902	5,515	0.8445
Belgium	3	0.0010	38	0.0058
Brunei Darussalam	920	0.3147	10,205	1.5626
Cyprus	1	0.0003	34	0.0052
United Arab Emirate	1,109	0.3793	2,323	0.3557
Hong Kong	1,735	0.5934	5,304	0.8122
India	-	-	11	0.0017
United Kingdom	77	0.0263	310	0.0475
Iraq	303	0.1036	-	-
Italy	25	0.0086	114	0.0175
Japan	395	0.1351	4,913	0.7523
Germany	148	0.0506	613	0.0939
Canada	-	-	43	0.0066
South Korea	-	-	4,369	0.6690
Kuwait	952	0.3256	3,004	0.4600
Malaysia	37,785	12.9233	156,312	239,346
Egypt	36	0.0123	352	0.0539
Monaco	859	0.2938	1,365	0.2090
Norway	35	0.0120	231	0.0354
Oman	56	0.0198	12	0.0018
France	1,018	0.3483	929	0.1268
Philippine	9	0.0031	26	0.0040
Portugal	3	0.0010	1	0.0002
Qatar	-	-	42	0.0064
Rumania	16	0.0055	4	0.0006
Arab Saudi	223,573	76.4668	384,822	589,241
Singapore	10,573	3.6162	48,896	7.4870
Spain	6	0.0021	73	0.0112
Surinam	53	0.0181	14	0.0021
Sweden	-	-	7	0.0011
Switzerland	6	0.0021	48	0.0073
Taiwan	178	0.0609	7,888	1.2078
Thailand	53	0.0181	14	0.0021
USA	6,897	2.3589	13,996	2.1431
Jordan	1	0.0003	-	-
Greece	971	0.3321	917	0.1404
Others	226	0.0749	224	0.0343
Total	292,315	100.0000	652,218	100.0000

Source: Indonesian Manpower Department, Directorate General of Overseas Labour,  
*The Development of Export Labour Program in Repelita IV and V, 1994.*

Labour migration to Malaysia has been experiencing a sharp increase since the Third Five Years Development Plan (Repelita III) when 11,441 migrants were recorded. This number rose to 37,785 during Repelita IV, and then increased about four times in Repelita V when a figure of 122,941 migrants was recorded (see Table 5, Hugo, 1995).

**Table 5 Total Number and Distribution of Indonesian Workers, 1974-1997**

Destination country	Repelita II (1974/1979)	Repelita III (1979/1984)	Repelita IV (1984/1989)	Repelita V (1989/1994)	Repelita VI (1994/1999)	Gender (%)		Total	
						Male	Female	N	%
Saudi Arabia	3,817	55,976	223,576	268,858	267,191	6.76	48.86	267,191	32.81
Other Middle East	1,235	5,349	3,428	5,145	16,071	0.26	3.03	16,078	1.97
Malaysia/Brunei	536/-	11,441/-	37,785/920	122,941/7,794	392,512	70.30	34.58	392,512	48.20
Singapore/Hong Kong	3,729	6,768	12,272	38,071	80,222	6.13	12.14	80,222	9.85
Korea/Taiwan/Japan	451	920	573	6,153	45,256	12.36	1.37	45,256	5.56
Others	7,274	15,956	13,711	17,010	13,100	4.19	0.01	13,156	1.62
Total	17,042	96,410	292,262	465,972	814,352	100.0	100.0	814,352	100.0

Source: Hugo, 1995.

Most of the Indonesia migrant workers who were sent by the government are the semi-skilled and unskilled workers, which are characterized by low education, limited knowledge and skills, occupy mostly by men and are aged between 15 and 40. Most Indonesian migrant workers are only capable of competing in less skilled jobs, which require manual labor. Based on the level of education, Indonesian migrant workers abroad have, on average, attained a maximum level of education of junior secondary

school while some do not even have any educational background at all. One research on education attainment of the returnee migrants originated three areas in Indonesia from Malaysia revealed this fact (see Table 6), which conducted by Mantra. They are limited to three sectors: plantations, domestic services, and construction. But since 1993, their employment has been extended to other sectors like manufacturing, attendants at filling stations, and as cleaners (Suko Bandiyono and Fadjri Alihar, 2000; Sukamdi and Abdul Haris, 2000). Therefore, approximately 36 percent of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia were employed in manufacturing; 26 percent in agriculture; 23 percent in domestic work and 8 percent in construction in 2002 (Kaur, 2004). Many of them come from Sumatra, Java, Bawean, Sulawesi and Nusa Tenggara.

**Table 6 Education Attainment of the Returnee Migrants from Malaysia**

Education Level	NTT		NTB		Bawean Island	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Never Completed Elementary School	27	15.3	63	38.7	39	20.9
Completed Elementary School	110	62.5	57	35.0	86	46.0
Completed Intermediate School	29	16.5	24	14.6	38	20.3
Completed High School	10	5.7	19	11.7	24	12.8
Total	176	100	163	100	187	100

Source: Mantra (1998). NTT refers to East Nusa Tenggara; NTB refers to West Nusa Tenggara.

As Sukamdi and Haris (2000) noted: the entire process of international labor migration can be generally categorized into two forms, based on the status of migration itself. First, is the formal labor migration, which is a process whereby the migrant leaving the country is forced to go through a number of procedures in order to acquire a clear legal legitimacy and warranty. This formal international labor migration is therefore the kind of migration that is carried out formally, through the channels that have government approval. Workers who migrate through this formal procedure are

usually provided with various documents that legitimize their migrant status in the country of destination. Second, is the informal process. This is the kind of migration that takes place informally and that in most cases is carried out without documentation. At a macro level, these kinds of migration activities are normally known as illegal migration, undocumented migration, and clandestine migration. Thus, whatever the form of international labor migration that takes place, it is evident that either of the two forms of processes is involved, depending on the development or growth of regional inequality. The pattern of Indonesian migrant workers to Malaysia includes two forms above mentioned. In any way, Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia constitute majority of overall migrant worker in Malaysia either in terms of legal migrants or illegal migrant. Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia constitutes majority of total foreign workers in Malaysia. According to the 1991 Population Census of Malaysia, there were 751,100 foreign nationals in Malaysia, accounting for 4.3% the country's total population of 17.56 million. As for nationality, Indonesians accounted for 54% of all foreign nationals, followed by 27% Filipinos. Table 7 shows that registered foreign workers as of January 2002 were 769,566, of which Indonesians were the largest in number (73%), followed by Bangladeshis (13.7%), Nepalese (6.3%) and Filipinos (2.2%) (Machiko WATANABE, 2003).

**Table 7 Foreign Workers in Malaysia (January 1, 2002)**

	Number (persons)	Share (%)
Indonesia	566,983	73.7
Bangladesh	105,744	13.7
Nepal	48,257	6.3
Philippines	17,287	2.2
Myanmar	6,539	0.8
Thailand	2,440	0.3
Pakistan	2,218	0.3
Others	20,098	2.6

Source: Malaysia, Department of Immigration.

Based on the report issued by the Malaysian Bureau of Emigration, by June 30 1992, the number of illegal Indonesian workers who had registered with the Malaysian government reached almost half a million people, which was 83% of total illegal migrants in Malaysia. This figures ranked highest among illegal workers registering themselves voluntarily with the Malaysian government (Nasution, 2000). Hugo (2000) and Kassin (2001) estimated the number of illegal Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia alone in the 2000 at about 1 million. Department of Manpower and Transmigration (2004) estimated the illegal Indonesia labor migrants were at about 3.5 million between 1999 and 2001. This number has been increasing due to the increasing number of unemployed workers in Indonesia since 1999 (Firdausy, 2005). In addition, many experts estimate that the number of illegal Indonesian workers is larger than the number of legal ones, which constitutes important migration stream. (Amjad, 1996; Prijono Tjiptoherijanto, 2000; Hugo, 2001). Over the last 10 years, migration flow to Malaysia, which has had a tendency to increase in volume, is a very real phenomenon. It is extremely difficult to obtain accurate statistics on Indonesian migrant workers to Malaysia because most of the migrants get there illegally. Basing on a study conducted by Kasim (1993), an anthropologist at Malaya University, it was estimated that there are between 600-700 thousand illegal migrant workers in Western Malaysia and between 200-400 thousand of them in Eastern Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak). Indeed, labor mobility from Indonesia to Malaysia constitutes the largest illegal labor migration flow in Asia (Prijono Tjiptoherijanto, 2000).

In terms of sex distribution, male migrant workers have been twice female migrant workers in formal sectors. For the informal sector, female migrant workers (mostly domestic helpers) have been more numerous than the male migrant workers (see Table 8). Female workers tend to migrate to countries to work as domestic helpers and entertainment jobs, while the large number of male workers tends to migrate to countries to work in construction, transportation, agricultural and estate sectors.

**Table 8      Placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Formal and Informal Sectors by Sex, 2003**

	Formal sectors			Informal sectors		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Malaysia	27,148	13,543	40,691	1,615	6,622	8,237
Taiwan	1,054	246	1,300	39	287	326
South Korea	5,075	929	6,004	92	23	115
Japan	61	0	61	0	0	0
Saudi Arabia	534	224	758	9,931	94,009	103,940

Source: Department of Manpower and Transmigration (2004), in Firdausy (2005); Ford (2005).

The feminization of new migrant workers starts to be trend. This feminization of the migrant labor force may be attributed to two factors related to change of Malaysian industrial structure and labor market. The first is linked to changes in the production niches (mass-customization products such as electronics, textiles and garments). The new international division of labor, which facilitated the increased labor force participation of the agricultural sector and rural-urban migration, principally of women. The second factor is related to the maturing of the labor market in Malaysia, which is relatively high labor force participation rates of women, and general labor shortages. This in turn has created an increased demand for domestic work and childcare services, which has been met by principally by Indonesian women. According to the Minister of Human Resources of Malaysia, there were about 155,000 foreign domestic workers (FDWs) in Malaysia in 2002, 70% of whom were Indonesians. These statistics refer to documented workers (Piper, 2005). Another source provided by Human Rights Watch (2004) revealed that more than 90% percent of domestic workers in Malaysia are Indonesian (Kaur, 2004).

## **The Reasons Why Indonesians Emigrate to Malaysia (Including Illegally)**

We know from the second part above that Indonesia is one of major migrant source countries and Malaysia became the largest receiving country of Indonesian migrant workers in 1990s. Why so many Indonesians prefer to emigrate to Malaysia?

1. Malaysia has been facing labor shortage and Indonesia has been facing surplus of unskilled and semi-skilled labor, so Malaysian government attract foreign workers into Malaysia and Indonesian government encourage Indonesians go abroad for working. On the one hand, Malaysian economy has experienced sustained growth though industrialization since the 1970s and put it into "labor shortage" situation. With rapid growth and structural changes of the economy, the structure of the labor market has also changed significantly. The increase in total number of employed persons had exceeded the increase in labor force since the 1970s. The total number of employed persons increased at an annual average of 3.7% during the decade from 1987 to 1997 when the annual average growth rate reached 8.5% while the increase in labor force remained at 3.1%. A large number of workers shifted to the manufacturing and services from rural plantation sector that had relatively inferior working conditions and lower wages compared with these urban industries. As a result, labor shortage became first in the agriculture, especially in the rural plantation, and then in the construction, manufacturing, service sectors. So, the Malaysian government pursued a proactive policy to recruit foreign migrant workers. On the other hand, Indonesia has been facing surplus of unskilled and semi-skilled labor and poverty problem. Indonesia has been backward behind its neighbor country, Malaysia, in terms of economic development, but has bigger population than that of Malaysia (see Table 9). In terms of the incidence of poverty, the Indonesian Central Board of Statistics (2005) using the official poverty line of per capita income per month at an average Rp.110 000 (equivalent US\$ 12.50), estimated the number of the poor in 2004 was about 19.6 percent, much higher the 11.3 percent in the pre-crisis year of 1996. In order to solve domestic unemployment and get more foreign exchange, Indonesia government encourage Indonesians to work abroad and put emigrants into

the Five Year Plan. Department of Labor office, particularly Directorate of Overseas Workers Services (AKAN), is in charge of planning and implementation of the migration program. The government of Indonesia through the office of AKAN has tried to maximize the profits and minimize the costs of the overseas migration through formal recruiters coordinated by an organization called the Indonesian Manpower Suppliers Association (IMSA). In one word, labor shortage in Malaysia and labor surplus in Indonesia is one of pull-push factors for migration from Indonesia into Malaysia and the two governments act as facilitator in the process of this migration.

**Table 9 Key Indicators in Indonesia and Malaysia**

	Indonesia	Malaysia
Population (millions)	216 (2004)	25.6 (2004)
Total working age population (millions)	113.0 (1997)	13.0 (1997)
Unemployment Rate and number of unemployment	9.5% 9.5 million (2003)	3.6% 0.3 million (2003)
Per Capita GDP (US \$)	728 (2000)	3881 (2000)
\$ 1-a-day Poverty Index	6.5 (2003)	0.2 (2003)
\$ 2-a-day-Poverty Index	50.5 (2003)	9.0 (2003)

Source: Selected from *Key Indicators 2005*, published by ADB.

2. With the Malaysia experienced more rapid economic development and labor shortage comparing to Indonesia, wage and salary in Malaysia has been higher than that of Indonesia. This constitutes another pull-push factor for migration from Indonesia to Malaysia. Table 10 and Table 11 show wage differences paid in Indonesia and Malaysia for a similar job (Mantra, 1999). In Malaysia, the wage is several times higher than that of similar job in Indonesia. Moreover, it is also true that the demand for labor in Malaysia especially for manual work in the agricultural, mining, plantation and construction sectors is indeed needed. This situation is made even worse by the fact that Malaysians, especially those who have attained some



intermediate or higher education, are no longer willing to take up some manual jobs in these sectors. They usually go to large cities to look for better working condition, higher pay and industrial jobs. In contrast, many Indonesians face the pressure of unemployment and poor living life, and intend to emigrate for getting high wages and improving their family living condition.

**Table 10 Wage Differences between Indonesia and Malaysia**

Year	Area of Origin	Local Wage Rate (Indonesia)	Wage Rate in Malaysia
1990	Lombok	Rp.500- Rp.1000/ Day	Rp. 7000 - Rp. 8000/ Day (Plantations)
1982	Bawean	Rp. 500/ Day	Rp. 9000/ Day
1991	Semarang	Rp. 2500/Day	Rp. 10,800/ Day (Sarawak)
1990	Indonesia	Rp. 1000/ Day	Rp. 10,000/ Day
1984	East Java	Rp. 3000/ Day	Rp. 9000/ Day

Source: Hugo (1993).

**Table 11 Labor Costs per Worker in Manufacturing in Selected Countries**

	US \$ per year		Indonesia= 1.0 (Index of wages)	
	1980-84	1990-94	1980-84	1990-94
Indonesia	898	1008	1.0	1.0
Philippines	1240	2459	1.38	2.44
Malaysia	2519	3429	2.81	3.40
Thailand	2305	2705	2.57	2.68
Singapore	5576	21534	6.21	21.36

Source: World Bank (2000), *World Development Indicators 1999*, cited from Manning (2002).

3. Geographic, historical and cultural links are also the reasons why Indonesian migrants choose Malaysia as a destination country of migration. From geographic perspective, Malaysia as a neighbor of Indonesia share very long costal and land boundary. Indonesian migrants, especially those illegal migrants, are easy to enter into Malaysia either by sea or cross-border. From historical perspective, mobility of Indonesian migrant workers to Malaysia has taken place in colonized time or even earlier. Pioneering migrants still maintain relationships with their origin area. They not only provide information for new migrants about job availability but also help them to find job. In one word, the new migrants are initially settled by the old migrants, mostly of their relatives and friends. From cultural perspective, Malaysia shares the same religion, same racial stock with Indonesia. Therefore, Indonesian migrant workers were ever more welcomed by Malaysia to extent because of similar culture background comparing migrants from other countries. Even Indonesian migration into Malaysia was also encouraged by the Malayan government for political reasons as their easy integration into the Malay community allowed Malays to maintain a numerical edge in population over the Chinese and Indians (Liow, 2003).

4. Intermediaries (called Tekong) play a crucial role in migration process including legal and illegal. Sometimes their role is limited to taking the prospective migrant to a recruiting agent, sometimes it involves financing the cost of migration (which is then repaid twice as much), and sometimes it covers the whole process (Battistella, 2002). A whole network of middlemen and recruitment agents has over the years “institutionalized” the movement and contributed to the growth of what has been called the “immigration industry”. These agents operate both within and outside the legal ambit, in both Malaysia and Indonesia. They organized most of the illegal migration into Malaysia, including recruiting workers, arranging the move, and obtaining and settling them into jobs (Pillai, 1996).

5. Irregular Migrants is caused by the factors mentioned above besides, especially caused by the high administrative costs of migration (including payments to labor agencies in Indonesia and Malaysia), bureaucratic procedures and restrictive

immigration policies in Malaysia. Potential migrants who want to work abroad by formal channel have to apply for overseas work permits, take skill training, obtain clearance from Labor Department and then get all compulsory travel documents. The entire process is slow, cumbersome and costly, and most of times bureaucratic delays in processing applications. The costs incurred by migrant workers include: fees charged by recruitment agents and middlemen; registration fees, visa fees, exit permit fees, travel and transport expenses before departure, air ticket, repatriation cost and various government levies and legal costs (Piyasiri Wickramasekera, 2002, and Firdausy, 2005). The costs and delays on both sides are therefore major factors encouraging illegal migration, which is cheaper and faster. Indonesian official migration system is also a significant factor in the growth of such a huge level of irregular migration from Indonesia on one hand. On the other hand, Malaysian restrictive immigration policies also facilitate the irregular migration from Indonesia into Malaysia. Rigid immigration laws in receiving countries and the continued tendency on the part of labor shortage countries to refuse admission to unskilled workers are a major cause of irregular and disorderly migration (Piyasiri Wickramasekera, 2002).

In general, the disparities of labor market and economy with close borders and well-established migration networks between these two countries, combined with improved transportation and information flows, are the major determinants that cause the flow and pattern of labor migration from Indonesia to Malaysia.

### **Terms and Routes Used by Irregular Migrant Workers from Indonesia into Malaysia**

According to Piyasiri Wickramasekera (2002), typical examples of irregular migrant workers are: overstays on tourist visa and engaged in work; students engaged in employment; trainees overstaying their visas; regular migrants continuing beyond the contract period; regular migrants running away from their designated

employer before expiry of contract; and persons trafficked into the sex industry. Indonesian irregular migrant workers in Malaysia include all of terms above. As well, clandestine movement across borders (undocumented labor migration or illegal movement) is also an important form.

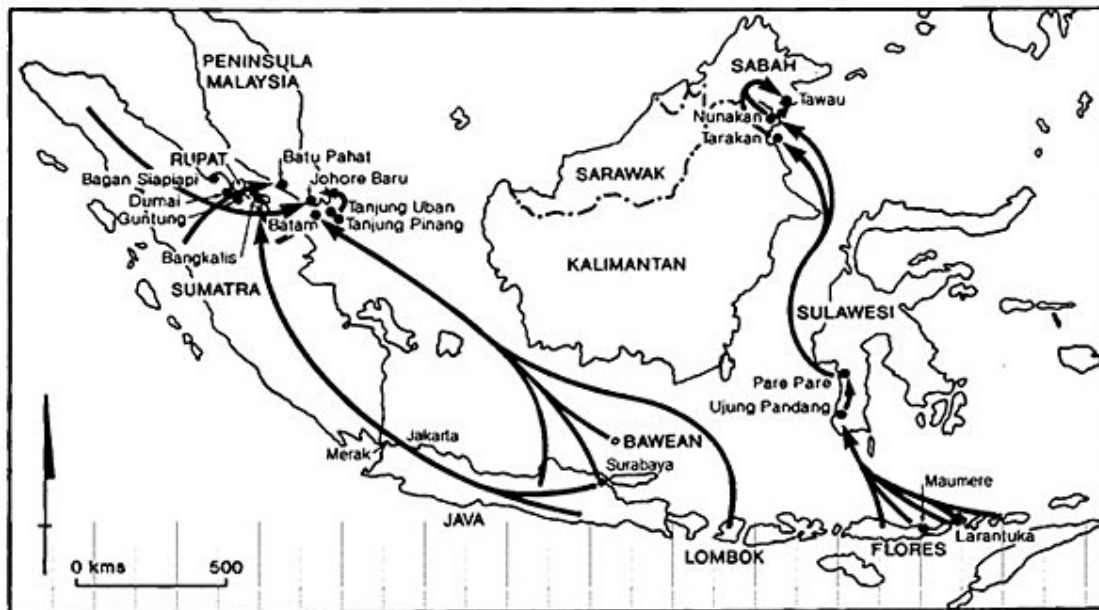
Mantra described clearly the routes taken by illegal Indonesian migrant workers into Malaysia. Illegal Indonesian migrant workers usually enter Malaysia through two directions or routes, that is, the eastern route and the western route. The western route which is popularly known as the “Peninsular Malaysian System” is usually taken by the illegal Indonesian migrant workers going to the Malaysian peninsula (western part of Malaysia). Illegal migrants following this route usually originate from East Java including Bawean island, North Sumatra, Aceh, West Sumatra (Minangkabau), Central Java, West Nusa Tenggara (mainly from the districts of East and Central Lombok). There are various routes to enter the Melaka strait through the west:

- Through the ports in the islands of Riau like Bengkalis, Dumai, Rupat and Bagan Siapiapi, entering the western coast of Johor and then docking at Pontian and Batu Pahat. A journey through this route takes almost one night to reach.
- Through Tanjung Pinang and Tanjung Uban in the islands of Riau or Batam near Singapore, then through Johor Sea (Pangerang, Guntung, Johor Lama, and Langisati Gulf). This journey requires approximately three hours to complete.
- For the Indonesian migrant workers particularly from East Java, they first of all travel to Bawean Island. It is from this island that middlemen from Malaysia then meet them and then illegally maneuver them into the country.

The eastern route also called the “Eastern Malaysian System” is usually followed by illegal Indonesian migrant workers from South Sulawesi and East Flores district. These intending migrants usually first go to Ujung Pandang, then to Pare-Pare where they join other migrant workers and move on to Nunukan island in East Kalimantan. It is from here that they then cross to Tawau (Sabah in East Malaysia). This route is more dangerous compared to the western route and takes up to 4 days to reach. There are also other Indonesian migrant workers from East Flores who go directly to

Balik Papan from where they then go to Tarakan, Nunukan, and to the border at Tawau in Sabah (see Figure 1) (Mantra, 1998, 1999).

**Figure 1 Main Migration Routes of Illegal Migrants from Indonesia to Malaysia**



Source: Cited from Hugo (2002).

### **The Impacts of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia on Relationship between the Two Countries**

Malaysian immigration policy has evolved from laissez-faire to a policy established on economic need, and more recently on based on social and security concerns (Pillai, 1999). Malaysia government carried out a laissez-faire immigration policy until mid-1980s. After that, it began to take restrictive immigration policy with the objectives of transforming the economy to a knowledge-based industrial structure and lowering dependence on foreign workers in the long term. The first measure to control the inflow of illegal foreign workers was taken in 1982 and in 1984 in order to legalize the recruitment of foreign workers. A Committee for the Recruitment of

Foreign Workers was established in 1982. The first bilateral agreement on migrant workers with Indonesia was signed in May 1984 (the Medan Agreement), followed by signing similar agreements with Thailand, Bangladesh and the Philippines. From 1984 onwards, several measures have been taken to control illegal migrants such as: the Foreign Worker Regularization Programme in 1989, 1992 (Ops Nyah I ) and 1996 (Ops Nyah II ) to register illegal workers; Amended Immigration Act in 1997; Ban on new recruitment of foreign workers and renewal of work permits during crisis between 1997-1998; Ban on new recruitment of Indonesians for all sectors except domestic maids in February 2002; More rigid new immigration law in August 2002; Amnesty for illegal foreign workers in 2002, 2004 and 2005; etc. All these measures were intended to promote legal employment and restrict (stop) illegal entry. However, these efforts taken by Malaysian government to curb the rise of illegal migrants did not yield any spectacular changes.

As mentioned above, Indonesian migration to Malaysia has long history extending back to colonial times, but almost halted during the World War Two and the years of confrontation of the two countries. From 1970, migration flow from Indonesia into Malaysia picked up again and continued to increase up to now. Finally, Malaysia became the largest destination of Indonesian migrant workers from 1990s instead of Saudi Arabia (see Table 5). Malaysia immigration policy toward Indonesian migrants has changed from welcome to rigid restrictive with the increase number of illegal migrant workers from Indonesia as the time goes by. Malaysia's tough new immigration laws went into effect August 1, 2002. The Immigration Act (Amended) 2002 calls for illegal foreigners to be fined up to M\$10,000 (\$2,631), imprisoned for five years, and to receive six strokes of the cane. There is going on cracking down illegal migrants in recent years. Illustrative of the government's changing stance towards irregular immigrants are the phrases used in political rhetoric. In general, the language used has toughened: a shift is notable from the use of the term "irregular migrants" in the 1970s to "illegal immigrants" in the early 1980s, gradually shifting to the common usage of "illegals" and "aliens" in the 1990s (Spaan, Van Naerssen and Kohl, 2002).

Indonesia migrant worker became more conspicuous, controversial and politicized in Malaysia with increasingly associated with crimes and worry about the spread of HIV and terrorism, following the increase inflow of illegal migrants. Some issues relating to Indonesian migrant workers, especially illegal migrants, were seriously concerned by Malaysians including media, citizens and government (Spaan, Van Naerssen and Kohl, 2002): (1) Crimes. One report indicated that the majority of recorded cases of burglary, rape and murder involved Indonesians (New Straits Times, July 1 2001); (2) Health hazard. The spread of HIV, malaria and leprosy through immigrants was feared; (3) Fraudulent marriage. Fraudulent marriage between Indonesian men and Malaysian women were considered socially unacceptable and deemed as immoral; (4) Immigrants are regarded to replace Malaysian workers and there has been rising resentment among Malaysians towards immigrants; (5) Chinese-dominated Democratic Action Party is suspicious that Indonesian immigrants will numerically increase the Malay population because the Indonesian immigrants will eventually assimilate to Malay society; (6) Stability and security. Stability and security caused by immigrants became widely debated after rioting by Indonesian immigrants at Malaysian immigration depots (i.e. Semenyih) in 1998. The phenomenon of illegal Indonesian migrant workers was fast becoming a “threat” to “national security” and had a potential rupturing effect on the fabric of Malaysia society (Liow, 2003).

Even more, illegal migrant workers from Indonesia to Malaysia caused conflicts and tension of relationship between Malaysia and Indonesia even though the two governments try to tone down the issue of illegal Indonesian migrant workers. Mass repatriation of illegal migrant workers taken by Malaysian government resulted in many problems because of under-estimation of number, a lack of communication and co-operation between Malaysian and Indonesian governments. For example, Malaysian parliament passed legislation in October 2001 that capped work permits foreign workers from 6 years to 3 years. Thus, Kuala Lumpur changed the official

status of many Indonesian from “legal” to “illegal” almost overnight. In response to the sudden changes, many Indonesian migrant workers detained at the Machap Umboo detention center in Alor Gajah rioted and made a Malaysian policeman injured. Later in November at the same year, 2,000 illegal workers who detained at the Pekan Nenas detention center in Johor also rioted. On 17 January 2002 in the state of Negri Sembilan, some 400 Indonesian workers at a textile factory in the Nilai industrial estate rioted and torched building after police tried to detain sixteen of their co-workers for alleged drug abuses. Three days later, another riot involving 70 Indonesian workers in Cyberjaya took place. Following these incidents, Malaysian government announced a “Hire Indonesians Last” policy and banned on new recruitment of Indonesians for all sectors except domestic maids in February 2002. In response to Malaysian policy toward Indonesian workers, there were protests outside the Malaysian embassy in Jakarta to criticize Malaysian treatment of Indonesian workers. Members of the Laskar Merah Putih burned the Malaysian flag outside the Malaysian embassy in Jakarta. Former National Assembly Speaker Amien Rias criticized Malaysia in Parliament and called for Jakarta to take action against its neighboring country. In turn, Malaysia responded with a stout diplomatic defense, and later warned its citizens against traveling to Indonesia, and calling for the Indonesian government to take action against those who threatened to jeopardize bilateral relations with their protests.

In addition, Malaysia’s decision to embark on a “Hire Indonesians Last” policy was undertaken without prior consultation or negotiation with Indonesia, and such unilateral action was not satisfied with the latter. Indonesian authorities were poorly prepared to deal with the chaotic situation that developed along parts of the country’s border with Malaysia. Before new immigration law took effect on 1 August 2002, in Kalimantan, the Indonesian province which borders Malaysian’s Sabah state, a transit town, Nunakan, turned into a heaving mass of human misery. Some 350,000 migrant workers and their families entered the town and camped in squalid condition. It was reported that as many as 85 people, including young children, died in Nunakan camps. On August 9, 2002, four Indonesians were sentenced to be fined, caned and



jailed under the new law, which had mixed reactions in Indonesia. At the same time, the respective government finger-pointed each other that the other has not been doing its part in the joint attempt to eradicate the problem of illegal immigration. Malaysian government has continually highlighted Jakarta's apparent unwillingness to render maximum co-operation in repatriating Indonesian illegal immigrants. In its parts, Indonesia has argued that Malaysia has been insensitive and un-co-operative by demanding the immediate repatriation of undocumented Indonesian labor, knowing that Jakarta itself was undergoing an even greater economic meltdown and could barely provide adequate holding and transportation facilities for returning workers.

The period from the second half of 2004 through to the beginning of 2005 was another vulnerable time for Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia because the Malaysian government had again carried out mass deportations of undocumented migrant workers in Malaysia based on its Immigration Act of 2002. Despite the Malaysian government's early warning in July 2004, no significant response came from the Indonesian government to anticipate the implementation of this policy. A May 2004 Malaysia-Indonesia MOU sets out procedures for Indonesians to work in Malaysia; it allows Malaysian employers to hold workers' passports and other documents for "safekeeping." Law No.39/2004 on overseas placement and protection of Indonesian migrant workers has not made a significant impact on labor placement management. Either Malaysia-Indonesia MOU or Law No.39/2004 did not cover the issues of illegal Indonesian migrant workers. Critics noted that the Indonesian government did little to assist returning unauthorized migrants. For the governments of Malaysia and Indonesia have assumed that deportation is the only way to settle the issue of illegal (undocumented) migrant worker. In its reality, however, deportation leaves many issues unresolved. Instead, every time a deportation takes place, tension increases in Indonesia-Malaysia diplomatic relations. There is also great potential for violence and human rights violations, especially when civilian vigilante groups are mobilized. Massive accumulations of deportees at transit points also leads to many serious problems, as was the case in Nunukan.

Until now, both of governments have not succeeded in co-operation over the issue of repatriation of Indonesian illegal immigrants. Inability to find a solution of illegal Indonesian migrant worker remains a thorn in both sides and shadows the relationship between them in long run.

## **Conclusion**

The labor flow between Indonesia and Malaysia has been the important part of labor migration in Asia-Pacific region and catch more and more attention. Indonesia has been the labor sending country and Malaysia has been the labor receiving country. Malaysia has been the largest destination of Indonesian migrant workers and Indonesian migrant workers have constituted majority of foreign migrant workers at the same time. Indonesian emigrant workers dominated by semi-skilled and unskilled workers with low education in oversea countries, including in Malaysia. Many experts estimate that the number of illegal Indonesian workers in Malaysia is larger than the number of legal ones, which constitutes important migration stream. There are complex factors caused labor migration from Indonesia into Malaysia. In general, the disparities of labor market and economy with close borders and well-established migration networks between these two countries, combined with improved transportation and information flows, are the major determinants that cause the flow and pattern of labor migration from Indonesia to Malaysia. In addition, Irregular Migrants is especially caused by the high administrative costs of migration (including payments to labor agencies in Indonesia and Malaysia), bureaucratic procedures and restrictive immigration policies in Malaysia. As we know, labor flow, unlike commodity export and import, will make multi-dimensional impacts on migrant workers themselves, the labor sending country, the labor receiving country, the relationship between labor sending and receiving countries, even region. Illegal migrant workers from Indonesia to Malaysia caused conflicts and tension of relationship between Malaysia and Indonesia. Until now, both of governments have not succeeded in co-operation over the issue of repatriation of Indonesian illegal

immigrants. Inability to find a solution of illegal Indonesian migrant worker remains a thorn in both sides and shadows the relationship between them in long run.

Semi-skilled and unskilled labor migration from Indonesia will still be dominant in the near future. There is a must for the governments in both Indonesia and Malaysia to facilitate international labor migration, particularly to unskilled and semi-skilled labor migrants. On both sides, greater cooperation between the two countries is needed. These aims to ensure a smooth flow of labor supply to meet labor demand, minimize the problem of illegal migration and its negative political, economic and social effects, and provide adequate protection for migrants. The approaches to solve the issues of labor migration, especially illegal migration, are not included in this paper.

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