

Selected Issues on Bilateral Relationship between Malaysia-Indonesia and the Role of University Students in Peacebuilding Approaches

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Abstrak

Hubungan Malaysia-Indonesia telah bermula sebelum kedatangan penjajah atas faktor-faktor seperti persaudaraan dan perdagangan serta kebudayaan. Hubungan ini terus terjalin walaupun kedua negara telah mencapai kemerdekaan membentuk identitinya tersendiri. Sungguh pun begitu, hubungan ini ada pasang surutnya. Isu-isu seperti sempadan, ekonomi, kebudayaan, hiburan, dan media sering kali mengundang ketegangan antara kedua negara. Pemimpin atasan antara negara berusaha menyelesaikan konflik seperti ini melalui jalur diplomasi dan negosiasi. Namun, usaha ini perlu mendapatkan sokongan daripada rakyat kedua negara supaya keamanan dan keharmonian boleh dikekalkan. Justru, dalam usaha mencegah konflik dan membina perdamaian, mahasiswa daripada Universiti Sains Malaysia menerusi kelab-kelab pelajar berusaha menyokong usaha damai antara kedua-dua negara melalui aktiviti-aktiviti bersifat akademik. Perkara ini dibuktikan dengan mengadakan persidangan mahasiswa, pertukaran pelajar, perbincangan meja bulat, pameran serta persembahan kebudayaan. Walaupun usaha ini dilihat tidak memberi kesan yang besar, tetapi ia memberi pendedahan kepada mahasiswa yang berpotensi menjadi pemimpin negara di masa hadapan tentang betapa pentingnya memantapkan hubungan kedua negara melalui

usaha-usaha perdamaian. Golongan mahasiswa ini mampu memberi pengaruh kepada golongan masyarakat yang lain melalui gaya kepemimpinan dan budaya intelektual mereka dalam menimba ilmu pengetahuan di universiti. Oleh itu, peranan mahasiswa sebagai pembina perdamaian dari bawah boleh membantu kerajaan dalam usaha memperkukuhkan hubungan Malaysia-Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Isu-Isu Terpilih Hubungan Malaysia-Indonesia, Konflik dan Pembinaan Perdamaian, Peranan dan Inisiatif Mahasiswa

Introduction

This paper aims to address the background relationship between Malaysia and Indonesia. History of the bilateral relationship for both countries are not only affected them, but other countries in the region. However, the discussion only focuses on the bilateral relationship between Malaysia and Indonesia which involved several issues that can be influenced it. Furthermore, in order to strengthen the bilateral relationship, the role of student based peacebuilding will be highlighted as an alternative track through some activities and academic approach.

The relationship between Malaysia and Indonesia not only started since the establishment of both countries, instead it happened before the arrival of colonizer. At that time, there was no immigration procedure that even bothers to check for people who want to move from One place to another place especially around the region of Nusantara.¹

¹ Indonesia and Malaysia, which occupy the same archipelago and have overlapping history and language, have fiercely disputed the ownership of Nusantara ("Archipelago") culture. See *Christopher Kremerr, Malaysia and Nusantara Heritage in the Adik-Abang Relationship*, Stanford Journal of

Basically, the people travelling for the purpose of relatives' relationship migrate and trades. But the underlying factor that influences the movement was the sharing of similarity from the various matters like the skin colour, culture as well as language. It was because they were believed to be originated from the same root of race. So, the sense of belonging makes them feel comfortable and easy to interact to each other in daily life.²

A Brief Background on Malaysia-Indonesia Relationship

Long time ago, the concept of Nusantara had been used since the empire of Srivijaya and Majapahit. The Sultanate of Malacca emerged after both empires were assumed as the continuity of the Nusantara's ideology to protect their people and also to prosper the whole region. Nevertheless, the concept of Nusantara almost vanished during the arrival an invasion of the imperialist party. The Western imperialists like Portuguese, Spain, and Netherland, Britainand even Japan from the East had colonized the whole region of Nusantara for economic and power reasons.

While they conquered the whole region, those colonizers particularly Britain and Netherland made a treaty in 1824 to divide the region and to avoid the conflict of interest among them. Therefore, the Nusantara region had been split according to the power of the colonizers.

International Relations: Standford UP,2011. PP. 28-29.

² A. Aziz Deraman. *Masyarakat dan Kebudayaan Malaysia Suatu Pengenalan dan Sejarah Ringkas*.Kuala Lumpur: PerpustakaanNegara. 1994

After the rise of nationalist movement in Indonesia, especially in Pulau Jawa led by Soekarno in order to fight with Netherland, they made a victory in gaining the independence in 1945.³ Afterwards, it was followed by the independence of the Malay Peninsula to be a Federation of Malay Land in 1948. Since the independence for both countries had been achieved, they attempted to revive the concept of Nusantara for the sake of their relationships. However, at the same time there were not only Malaysia and Indonesia gained the independence as several countries in the region that made to become independence from colonizer like the Philippines, Singapore, and many more.⁴

So, as sovereign and independent countries in the region, other countries should be involved for the sake of security and economic development. That was why in 1961, the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) had been launched in conjunction with the Bangkok Treaty. The aim of ASA was to develop the country socially and economically and to prevent the ideology of communism. The members of ASA were Malaysia and Indonesia together with the Philippines. However, the ASA has failed due to dispute between Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Both Indonesia and the Philippines did not recognize the formation of Malaysia in 1963 because it was assumed as a new model of neocolonialism in the region.⁵

³ Ricklefs, M.C. *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Sejarah Indonesia Modern), Cetakan semula Macmillan Asia Tenggara. 1981. P. 198

⁴ Gates, C. L. & Than, M. *ASEAN Enlargement: Impacts and Implications*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. 2001.

⁵<http://www.arkib.gov.my/penubuhan-malaysia-16-september-19631>. Retrieved on May 13, 2014.

Then, MAPHILINDO (abbreviation of the word Malaysia, Philippines, and Indonesia) is a cluster of three countries involved and formed in 1963. The primary goal of this alliance is to enhance the friendly relations and settle the disputes between Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia. The MAPHILINDO asked the United Nations to involve in this formation of Malaysia. Thus, the Cobbold Commission has been created to address the support of Sabahan and Sarawakian people to join the formation of Malaysia. As a result of the Cobbold Commission, majority of the population and the citizens of both states have agreed and supported the formation of Malaysia. Nevertheless, Indonesia and the Philippines did not recognize the vote and view of the results. Therefore, the two countries continued to critique and resist the formation of Malaysia Federation of the sovereign.⁶

The Philippines still put its claim on Sabah due to historical background that Sabah was under the Sulu Sultanate for the first place. As a result, the government of the Philippines broke the diplomatic relationship with Malaysia. But, the worst thing was when Indonesia launched a confrontation to Malaysia with the slogan 'Ganyang Malaysia'.⁷ The confrontation was an undeclared war with most of the action occurred in the border area between Indonesia and East Malaysia on the Island of Borneo (known as Kalimantan in Indonesia). The conflict was characterized as restrained and isolated ground combat, set within tactics

⁶ Abdullah, M. N. *Kemasukan Sabah dan Sarawak ke Dalam Persekutuan Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka. 1979.

⁷ Indonesia Newspaper, Kompas entitled "Sukarno, Malaysia, dan PKI" Saturday, September 29, 2007.

of low-level brinkmanship. Combat was usually conducted by company or platoon sized operations on either side of the border. The conflict is sometimes informally referred to as the 'Platoon Commander's War', at least before the start of Operation Claret. Indonesia's campaign of infiltrations into Borneo sought to exploit the ethnic and religious diversity in Sabah and Sarawak compared to that of Malaya and Singapore, with the intent of unraveling the proposed state of Malaysia.⁸ However, the wisdom of the leaders under the leadership of Teunku Abdul Rahman has successfully rescued the country from the disaster of war with the people cluster. Excellent outcome of negotiations between the Tun Abdul Razak and Tan Sri Ghazalie Shafie, Tun Adam Malik, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, and General Ali Moertopo in Bangkok and Jakarta, Malaysia-Indonesia confrontation was over.⁹

According to the basic history above, the relationship between Malaysian and Indonesia had a sort of up and down. It caused by several factors such as political ideology, impact of colonialism as well as economic concern. However, both countries still strive to maintain the good relationship for the sake of peace and stability. In addition, there are from the same origin. In order to achieve the developing nation status, Malaysia and Indonesia cannot avoid several issues that created tension among their people. The disputes between Malaysia and Indonesia will be addressed below with some related issues.

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesia%E2%80%93Malaysia_confrontation. Retrieved on June 1, 2014

⁹ Nik Mahmud, N. A. *Konfrontasi Malaysia Indonesia*. Bangi: Penerbit UKM. 2009.

Overlapping Claims and the Border Dispute

The geographical factor always creates conflict between Malaysia and Indonesia due to the border sharing. The issues that arise in this matter are like petroleum and gas exploration or fishing activities for example, the Ambalat dispute. This issue was the continuity from the dispute between Malaysia and Indonesia on Sipadan-Ligitan authority.¹⁰ International Court of Justice (ICJ) as arbitrator in this issue gave the authority to Malaysia on Sipadan-Ligitan due to several reasons like Malaysia has continued control and administration since 1878. This is based on the control and regulation of the collection of eggs turtles, the formation of 'Bird Sanctuary' and the construction of a lighthouse.¹¹ So, when Malaysia provides the exploration rights Shell at Ambalat area, Jakarta clearly states that Ambalat belongs to them and immediate steps were taken by sending warships and aircraft to the ground. However, both countries finally agreed to resolve this Ambalat dispute through diplomacy. Besides, there are some issues about Malaysian's fisherman arrested by Indonesian's authorities for trespassing their national waters.¹² This also often occurs due to Indonesian's fisherman because of the difficulty to define the boundaries of international waters.¹³

¹⁰ Maksun, A. *Hubungan Indonesia-Malaysia Selepas Era Suharto (1998-2008): Satu Analisis*. Master Thesis. Universiti Malaysia Sabah. 2010. P. 94

¹¹ http://www.bharian.com.my/articles/IsusempadanmaritimMalaysia-Indonesiamungkinimbangtara/Article/iiseas.um.edu.my/filebank/published_article/437/049%20-%20068%20%20Wan%20Sharwaluddin.pdf. Retrieved on June 3, 2014

¹² <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/bahasa/article/anifah-malaysia-indonesia-perlu-sop-urus-isu-sempadan> Retrieved on June 4, 2014.

¹³ <http://www.sinarharian.com.my/nasional/malaysia-indonesia-sepakat-selesai-isu-sempadan-1.226778>. Retrieved on June 4, 2014

Illegal Immigrant and Workers in Malaysia

Since January 2014, the total of legal workers in Malaysia is around 2.3 million. However, the population of illegal immigrants is assumed to be much more based on *Program Penyelesaian Menyeluruh Pendatang Asing Tanpa Izin* (Programme of 6P).¹⁴ The numbers of Indonesian illegal immigrants are about 201,237.¹⁵ The arrival of illegal immigrants in Malaysia is because of the demand from the local people. In addition, the locals do not want 3D jobs (dirty, dangerous, and difficult). So, those immigrants are willing to do all these works. The flood of illegal immigrants and foreign workers will create several problems like epidemic, crime, and social problems.¹⁶ The government also has to provide some cost to handle these illegal immigrants for foods, detention centre, and transportation to send them back. Malaysia as a host country will blame their neighbor; especially Indonesia because majority of the illegal immigrants is from there and their government is not good enough to control the movement of their people. Thus, this issue can be one the bad factors for Malaysia-Indonesia relationship.¹⁷ One of this issues which is related with this matters is about the abuse of the Indonesian workers in Malaysia. For example, the case of Nirmala

¹⁴http://www.utusan.com.my/utusan/Rencana/20140110/re_08/PATI-KDN-jangan-tunggu-rakyat-jadi-muak. Retrieved on June 4, 2014

¹⁵<http://liewchintong.com/my/2013/07/pertanyaan-lisan-parlimen-27-06-13-bilangan-pati/> Retrieved on June 4, 2014

¹⁶http://www3.utusan.com.my/utusan/Forum/20140124/fo_03/Tahniah-KDN-banteras-pendatang-asing-tanpa-izin. Retrieved on June 4, 2014.

¹⁷ Hassan, C. H. *Buruh Asing di Malaysia: Trend, Kaedah, Kesan, Masalah dan Cara Mengatasinya*. In JATI Journal of Southeast Asian Studies. Universiti Malaya Press. Vol. 14, December 2009

Bonat and the problems of Indonesian maids in Malaysia. Nirmala Bonat case is considered as a case of abuse and brutality of an employer to its employees. The employer, Pack Hua was sentenced to prison for 18 years on three charges under section 326 of the Penal Code for voluntarily causing grievous hurt by weapons.¹⁸ On the other hand, there was a case about Hanni Seo, an Indonesian maid who was sentenced because she pleaded guilty for trying to kill his former employer, Phang Kian Huang in Air Itam, Penang. However, the sentence is considered mild when the court noted that Hanni Seo act as the face of various forms of stress and feel persecuted and mistreated by her former boss. She was not just constantly scolded and assaulted by her former boss, but also not given the salary for 20 months of work.¹⁹

Media and Entertainment

Media is the most mainstream information distribution for people in the world. Nowadays, the spreading of information is getting faster with the latest social media on the internet based like Facebook, Twitter, and also online newspapers. Some says that the role of media is to update the information on the current issue so the readers will not left behind and it can increase the knowledge. But, others say that media can be a trigger to increase the tension between people with sensational or

¹⁸ http://www.agc.gov.my/cnc/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1655:akhirnya-penderanirmala-bonat-masuk-penjara&catid=83:appellate-and-trial&Itemid=457 Retrieved on June 6, 2014.

¹⁹ http://www.utusan.com.my/utusan/info.asp?y=2009&dt=0828&pub=Utusan_Malaysia&sec=Rencana&pg=re_08.htm Retrieved on June 6, 2014

provocative news in order to attract the people. The role of media cannot be avoided from the influence of the relationship between Malaysian and Indonesia because it can increase the sentiment between people of both countries by several issues.²⁰

One of the provocative actions could be addressed in 2005 when Malaysia and Indonesia had a dispute about Ambalat petroleum exploration near to Sulawesi Island. The media raised the issue to gain support from local people in Indonesia because they felt afraid that Ambalat will be conquered by Malaysia according to previous history that Sipadan-Ligitan had been given to Malaysia due to ICJ result. In order to respond to the issue, some university students in Riau launched the slogan of 'Ganyang Malaysia'. This slogan had been launched by former President Soekarno during confrontation with Malaysia. Nonetheless, this time they rebrand the slogan and add 'Selamatkan Siti Nurhaliza', a famous singer from Malaysia. That means, even though they did not like the action taken by Malaysian Government, they still respect some Malaysians who attracted them in entertainment field.²¹

In 2009, there were several issues that have been raised by Indonesian media pertaining to culture, song, and celebrity matters. First, the issue of Malaysian National Anthem, *Negaraku* was originally from the *TrangBulan Song*, the famous folk song in 1930's both in Indonesia

²⁰ Harun, R. (ed.) *Malaysia's Foreign Relations: Issues and Challenges*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press. 2006.

²¹ Heryanto, A. edited. *Popular Culture in Indonesia: Fluid Identities in Post-Authoritarian Politics*. Oxon: Routledge. 2008