

# Questioning SBY-Kalla's Promises on Welfare Issues

Friday 21 July 2006, by [ARIANE Zely](#) (Date first published: 21 July 2006).

After the protest demanding Direct Cash Assistance (BLT) on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2006 (see below) in Jakarta, Urban Poor People's Union (SRMK) held another protest together with the National Network of Mahardhika Women, People's Democratic Party (PRD), and National Front for Indonesian Labor Struggle (FNPBI) on June 29, 2006. Similar protest was also organized by SRMK's branch in Makassar, South Sulawesi.

Several sub-district level public meetings were organized in Jakarta as preconditions to the big mass protest on June 29. These meetings were intended to raise a campaign around people's pressing problems,

which should be resolved by the government of SBY-Kalla. The immediate demands which were based on the urgent problems of the people (according to a survey by the Post of the Poor People's Struggle/PROPRAM committees on the second week of April 2006) were minimum wage increase to Rp.1.250.000

a month (around US\$120) across the board (today's minimum wage is around US\$ 90); subsidy for nine basic needs commodities; prolongation of Direct Cash Assistance to all of the poor families; free health care and educational system; cheap, decent and healthy housing; food and nutrition security for children; free citizenship administration services; capital and production technology subsidy for the farmers; employment for the people; protection of women's dignity from the sexist Anti Pornography law.

On Sunday, May 14, masses of 700 urban poor people - mostly housewives and children - from slum area around Jakarta, gathered at Tanjung Duren sub-district in West Jakarta. They came for a public debate on the government responsibility on a free health care service. The keynote speakers were Amin Bunyamin (member of the House of Representative); a representative of the Department of Health; the Director of the State-Owned Health Insurance Company; Iskandar Sitorus (Director of Health Aid Institute); and Lalu Hilman Afriandi (General Chairperson of The Indonesian Student League for Democracy).

The following month, on June 11, the same occasion was held in Tanah Merdeka slum, Kali Baru sub-district, North Jakarta. It was attended by at least 500 local communities. The keynote speakers were Nursuhud and M Junaedi SE (member of IX legislative commission);

Herimianto (Department of Health); Umbu Marisi MPH (General Manager PT. ASKES); and Nia Yuniarsi (Division of Litigation of Health Aid Institute).

Immediately after those two public meetings, the following week, on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2006, another meeting held at the worker's community basis in Bojong Kavling slum at Cengkareng sub-district, West Jakarta. The meeting was entitled A Decent Wage and Free Health Care System. Another member of the House of Representative (DPR) coordinating the welfare and labor affairs, Dr. Ribka Tjiptaning, attended to speak. Drs. Amrin Apt (from DKI Jakarta Health Official), and Dita Indah Sari (Chairperson of PRD) were the other speakers.

### **Questioning the Health Care System**

One of the 100-days programs of the SBY-Kalla's cabinet was a development of the so-called Health Assurance System for the Poor People (HASP) in order to broaden the free health services to the Community Health Centers, and to promote free healthcare services at the third grade class government-owned hospital.

Urban Poor People's Union (SRMK), as the host of the public debate, stated that the lack of information about the ASKESKIN (The Health Insurance of Poor Family) or Health Card, or GAKIN (Poor Family Card) had been the weakness of the program. The poor have never got any socialization around those policies, so they did not know how it works.

Nevertheless, those problems are the impact from high prices of medical treatment and medicines as the fundamental problem of healthcare service today. Marlo Sitompul, a general chairperson of SRMK said; "from SRMK's experiences in advocating the poor to get the assurance, the hospital officials mostly said that they did not know anything about the system, or if they knew, the patients would not be exempt for all cost, the patients should pay at least 25% of the cost upfront."

In the 14<sup>th</sup> May debate, Bunyamin, a member of the House of Representatives (DPR) said that the government has budgeted Rp.3,6 trillion for the health fund of 60 million poor people in 2006. And a free health care services for the poor can only be obtained if the poor has passed the procedure [administer the ASKESKIN (The Health Insurance of Poor Family) or Health Card, or GAKIN (Poor Family Card)].

The problem has become worse when the government did not want to consider that the fundamental cause of the destruction of healthcare system is mainly the privatization of state-owned pharmaceutical industries (e.g. Kimia Farma; Kalbe Farma etc), along with a dependency on imported medicines and medical equipments. Another reason is a budget allocation, which were not adequate to overcome the basic health problem of the poor.

Lalu Hilman added that "the allocation of 3,6 trillion budget to 60 million poor people will cause new problems, like the previous Direct Cash Assistance [2]. Central Bureau of Statistic's indicator toward which and how one family categorized as poor is no longer unacceptable. Today, the poor people under \$2 a day has boosted to 120 million or doubled from the government estimation. And with that income, definitely, the health condition is apprehensive."

## **Manipulation**

On a statement released on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2006, The Urban Poor People's Union reported that they were asked to attend an input meeting in Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare's office on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2006. The program titled "Coordination Meeting on Free Health Care Service for the Poor Family", attended by hospital directors; representative from Department of Health; President Director of Health Insurance for the Poor; heads of Jakarta Health Officials, heads of Community Health Centers, and a range of Deputies of People's Welfare Ministry on Health and Environment Affairs.

During the meeting, all the functionaries insisted that they did not and would never make something difficult to the poor in order to get a free health service at the hospital. Even the Director of Fatmawati [3] Hospital emphasized that the hospital has never overridden services for the poor family.

Of course that was a lie, a manipulation, because on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2006, KOMPAS-a national newspaper-reported that one patient from a poor family repeatedly came to the Jakarta Health Official to get help from the Jakarta Regional Government without any result except for disappointment. Another case happened at the Fatmawati Hospital where one patient was detained; although he had a Letter of Poor Annotation the hospital even still asked him to pay all costs to cover treatment and nursing.

Those are the facts, which repeatedly happen all over this country, the so called a Health Assurance System for the Poor People (HASP), has been something to be fought for by mass action, not an available service.

### **Political Enthusiasm**

According to Muhammad Dika Nusantara, a region secretary of Regional Leadership Committee (KPW) of PRD Jakarta as well as a member of the POPRAM (a neighborhood-based community alliance), the people is very enthusiastic to hear and to get to know the issues around their economic live. It also added some political confidence to the people who are just getting to know their basic rights and how they have to struggle for it.

Many people took the opportunity to directly speak out their basic problems in front of the DPR's members. Most of them were surprised because it was the first time the government and parliament's officials came to their slum and were willing to discuss with them around the pressing problems of the poor. They previously considered that kind of occasions were typical for pre-election campaign only, not really for changing their lives.

From these three occasions, the poor people enthusiastically prepared the logistic to accelerate their further mobilization to pressure the their immediate demands. They agreed to regularly organize protests which will escalate in the number of political participation, as well to save some money on a daily basis (around Rp.500) for regular mobilization purpose.

Dika Nusantara also added: "before the poor people were organized, they already hated the government of SBY-JK as well as the local government bureaucracy. They said that this government could not bring the economy of the poor people to welfare, because they had raised the fuel price twice this year, no job opportunity and big lies on free health care and education."

This argument were strengthened by Ibu Kus (a mother with several children of which one is a 'penny street musician' who was beaten to death by the city police squad) who said that; "this government is a government of the rich people and foreign company. They let the foreign company robbed our natural resources and brought back billion of dollars a year to their

country while we had been forced to pay the debt until we finally die."

### **The 29<sup>th</sup> June Mass Action and Its Political Significances**

In the highly fragmented national political issues today, it is necessary to raise issues which can represent the urgent interest of all sectors of community and the ways to resolve them. The welfare issues were hardly prioritized since the neo-liberal economic crisis brought about the suffering of 120 million people who live below \$2 a day. The neo-liberalism might not be a common language of the poor people, but they completely agree that today's system has been treating them in a very brutal way.

All of their pressing demands previously mentioned are matters of life and death, which is why they extremely need a vision that would describe an alternative solution, particularly in terms of financing the urgent needs of the poor. The June 29 demonstration started the discourse on how we are financing it.

Not less than five thousands poor people (mostly housewives with children and also female worker) wearing read t-shirts poured outside of SBY's presidential palace on June 29. The big banner in front of the rally was written "Take over (nationalize) the Mining Industry; Repudiate the Debt; and (use the money for) National Industrialization for the Wellbeing of the People."

In her speech, Vivi Widyawati, the coordinator of National Network of Mahardhika Women, stated: "the development of modern national industry is the basis to raise our dignity as women. Our women and children are not immoral or seeking to be prostitute on the streets and being targeted by the recent anti pornography law; or being trafficked as immigrant workers. They are forced to do that as the government has no concept on how to provide decent jobs for the people. This is what happen to the country whose government surrendered to the neo-liberalism crime." She also added that productive work for women will reduce economic dependency on man, so it would also reduce polygamy practice, women trafficking, domestic violence, and prostitution. The state money from mining industry will also benefit the creation of free children shelters and playgrounds at work places, markets etc.

At the end of the protest, Marlo Sitompul asserted that: "the government of SBY-Kalla and their cabinet had failed, and we won't give our hope to the other liar politicians in the parliaments today. We need to organize our own political force that emerged from daily struggle. Our political objective required a fundamental change on economic and political direction, the reverse of neo-liberalism economic."

He concluded the speech by stated that the new and pro poor people's economy is the economy which gives full protection to public services and pharmaceutical industries; to nutritious food for the children (up to 12 years old); to the production of the farmers (particularly the rice farmers to supply the people with cheap and good rice [4]).

One week before the protest took place; there were a national conference of twelve organizations including PRD and SRMK to promote an alternative political instrument in order to get involved in the 2009 election. The conference made the decision to form a national preparatory committee of the Party of National Liberation Unity (KP-PAPERNAS). It will be launched on July 23, 2006 and would be another important step in advancing the political struggle of the people.

## **Notes**

[1] The Head of the International Relation of People's Democratic Party (PRD)

[2] BLT (Direct Cash Assistance), a compensation budget for the poor set up after the fuel price hike last year.

[3] A State Owned Hospital located in South Jakarta

[4] Rice is the staple food of most Indonesian people

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## **Thousands of poor demand cash assistance**

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Zely Ariane, Jakarta

On March 15, at least 2000 poor people, most of them housewives, rallied outside the office of the minister for people's welfare, before marching to the presidential palace and the Jakarta governor's office, to demand that the poor receive the payment of direct cash assistance (BLT) as compensation fuel price increases for all those living on incomes of less than \$2 a day.

Hundreds of poor people in Surabaya in Eastern Java, Palembang in South Sumatra, and Samarinda in Eastern Kalimantan demonstrated on the same day outside the local governors' offices and the offices of the State Electricity Company (PLN).

The number of those who should be able to get the assistance, is growing all the time. Those living on 125,000-175,000 rupiah (US\$13-18) a month now number about 118 million, out of a total population of 230 million.

Jakarta protest also called access to cheap rice, cheap cooking oil and kerosene, free education and health care, free civic administration services (identity and family cards, marriage and birth certifications), cheap housing and the legal right to residence without forced eviction for non-payment of rent. It also opposed projected electricity price rises.

At the presidential palace, five delegates from the Union of the Urban Poor (SRMK) led by its chairperson, Marlo Sitompul, as well as by Dita Sari, chairperson of the Peoples Democratic Party (PRD), were received inside where they stated their demands.