

# Migrant Workers in a Corner of the Growth Triangle

By : Ace Partadiredja

## Introduction

Twenty kilometres southeast of Singapore, or about 25 minutes by ferry, there is an Indonesian island, Batam. This 415 sq km island, with reddish yellow podzolic soil, is agriculturally good for nothing but tropical shrubs, snakes and monkeys, and some would add, is financially a loss to the Indonesian government. Until the mid-1970s, this island was rather tranquil, somewhat backward, and like the other islands in Riau, was practically uninhabited except by a handful of farmers and fishermen.

In December 1989, the then Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore Goh Chok Tong put forward the idea of a Growth Triangle involving Singapore, the nearby Malaysian state of Johor and the Indonesian island of Batam. Malaysia and Indonesia have endorsed the Growth Triangle concept. A S \$ 600 million joint venture to develop an industrial park on Batam island was announced in January 1990. In July 1990, an Indonesian working group was formed to coordinate the development of Riau Province. On 28 August 1990, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Indonesia and Singapore to promote the development of Riau Province. The devel-

opments in Batam have progressed at a significant pace.

Approved foreign investment in Batam topped US\$ 295 million in 1990 while approved domestic investment increased by seven-fold, from Rp 53 million in 1989 to Rp 354 million in 1990. Singapore is still the main foreign investor in Batam; Indonesian investors, notably the Salim Group, have also made their presence felt on the island. The investments, foreign and local, have largely gone into real estate, tourism and electronics. All the same, growth has occurred on all fronts.

This paper is intended to expound the issues and prospects in supplying workers, especially at lower skill levels, to the flourishing manufacturing sector on the island. It is also envisaged that the lessons learned through the Batam experience can be applied to the other parts of Indonesia. The next section of this paper offers a historical sketch of island's development as well as an outline of the comprehensive master plan for Batam. The third section,

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which forms the core of this research project, analyses the profile and other characteristics of the workers, their reasons for taking up employment in Batam, and their expectations. The lessons that can be drawn from this project are discussed in the fourth section while the concluding remarks are taken up in section five.

A questionnaire survey was conducted over a two-month period, from February to March 1991. The respondents were, at that time, undergoing training in Singapore before taking employment with various companies in the Batam Industrial Park. Five hundred questionnaires were sent through Batamindo Industrial Management Pte Ltd. A total of 498 questionnaires were returned, duly completed. This represents a response rate of 99.8%.

Before we move on to discuss our research findings, an overview of the developments on Batam island is presented in the next section. This is to facilitate a better appreciation of the manpower issues featured in this paper.

### **The Transformation of Batam**

Unlike the mainland (*Riau Daratan*) of Riau Province, the 3,214 islands of the Riau archipelago (*Riau Kepulauan*) are much underdeveloped, sparsely populated, but potentially rich in mineral resources, tourist spots, and strategically located. Batam is one of them. Batam's geographical position at the crossroad of international shipping routes between the Indian ocean and Pacific ocean, makes it, like Singapore, a strategic site for the processing and distribution of commodities, and its close proximity to Singapore underscores its potential as a centre for manufacturing and

tourist activities.

Batam's rapid development, however, did not begin until the mid-1970s. The first master plan for Batam was prepared by Nissho-Iwai, a Japanese consultancy firm, and Bechtel of the United States. The study was commissioned by the Indonesian state-owned oil company, Pertamina, to develop the island into a base for oil and gas exploration, and related downstream processing activities. The marine bases at Batu Ampar and Sekupang are the result of this initiative. The master plan was approved by the President, who concurrently issued Decree No. 41 of 1973, which provided for the establishment of Batam island as an industrial area.

By the late 1970s, it was clear to Indonesian planners that Batam can offer more than just logistic bases for the energy industry. The original master plan was reviewed by an American consultant: CRUX in 1977. This study considered the decline in oil and oil-related activities, and recommended guidelines for a more broad-based development of the Batam Island. The development strategy embraced a wider vision of future growth for the island, which is strategically located some 20 km south of Singapore. Studies were conducted to help develop Batam into an industrial, commercial and tourist centre as well as to expand its traditional role as a warehousing and transshipment centre.

A new Presidential Decree, No. 45 of 1978, was issued to encourage the development of export-oriented industries and to streamline the importation of materials required by manufacturing industries on the island. The entire island was designated as a bonded zone. In 1979, a review of

previous planning studies led to the formulation of a comprehensive master plan for the island up to the year 2006.

The 1979 master plan focused on the development of transshipment facilities, the establishment of industrial estates, the development of areas for the import and export of goods, the construction of tourist activities and the provision of infrastructural support such as offices, shopping centres, recreational facilities and residential units. The master plan takes into account Batam's relations with Singapore in almost every aspect. In particular, it focused on Singapore's almost exhausted capacity for further expansion which would, of course, be Batam's comparative advantage for the future. At the same time, Batam is well-positioned to take advantage of Singapore's established business and financial services network as well as the city-state's efficient facilities for communication, transportation and other services. Batam's potential as an investment location is now duly recognised:

"Batam is extremely attractive for industrial, trade and tourist enterprises due to its strategic location and its very close proximity to Singapore's excellent trading, banking, transport and business service facilities".

Professor Dr Ing. B.J. Habibie  
(Indonesian State Minister for Research and Technology).

The 1979 comprehensive master plan, which serves as the blueprint for Batam's development to the year 2006, divides the island into four major development areas, with each region playing a different role in Batam's development. The

Batu Ampar area, in the north, has been designated for light and medium industries as well as transshipment activities; the Sekupang area, as a centre for agro-based industries, and for export processing and transshipment activities; The Tanjung Uncang peninsula (southeast of Sekupang), as a complex for wood processing industries; the east coast as the main industrial complex for light and medium industries; and, the Nongsa area, in the northeast, as a holiday resort and tourist centre. Batam Centre will be the island's administrative and commercial hub.

The Batu Ampar area, comprising the sub-regions of Batu Ampar and Muka Kuning, is being rapidly developed into a region for light and medium-scale industries. Some 30 to 40 industries, mostly of medium size, will be accommodated in the planned industrial zone. Some existing heavy industries, situated for the most part close to the present harbour facilities, are also located in this area.

Mukakuning, a landlocked area adjacent to Batu Ampar, will also be used for light and medium industries, government and commercial offices and housing. A large scale industrial development project taking shape in the Mukakuning sub-region is the 500-hectare Batam Industrial Park.

The Sekupang region, comprising Sekupang, Tanjung Uncang and Sagulung, has already undergone significant development. Office buildings have been constructed, water supply lines have been installed, and electricity generation and transmission system have been laid down. This zone will be the focal point for a core of light-to-medium sized industries. The development plan for Sekupang includes

provisions for small-scale shipyard and ship repair industries, agricultural activities and fisheries. The port facilities at Sekupang are being expanded to service the island's export-based industries as well as inter-island trading, cattle exporting, transshipment and other shipping activities.

A S\$ 1 billion property development project, said to be the biggest on the island, is being developed here; the 2000-hectare resort, to be developed over a 10-year period, comes complete with a theme park, country club, golf and shooting ranges, duty-free shops, supermarkets, restaurants and nightclub.

The East Coast region, which comprises the sub-regions of Kabil-Batu Besar, Duriangkang-Tanjung Piayu and Nongsa, is stated to be the "heart and core" of the island. The development plan has allocated some 4000 hectares in the Kabil-Batu Besar vicinity for medium-scale and heavy industries, with a smaller area aside for integrated wood industries. A US\$ 400 million industrial park is under construction here; the 365-hectare Batam Kuang Hwa Industrial Zone is strategically located with Asia Port at its doorstep and is only a five-minute drive from the airport.

The sub-region of Nongsa is set to be the island's tourist centre. Nongsa already boasts a number of world class hotels and recreational facilities while several more hotels and motels, golf courses and marinas are under construction in 1991, will have sea-sport facilities and resort accommodation spread over 11 hectares of waterfront. A road network connects these tourist facilities to airport, harbour and ferry terminals, and other centres on the island.

Batam Centre, looking out across

Tering Bay, is being developed into administrative and commercial core of the island. Batam Centre is set to be the downtown area of the island, containing government offices, educational institutions, shopping centres, commercial complexes, hotels, and leisure and recreation facilities. Residential districts will be arranged around this urban core to accommodate those working here. Some 147 000 out of the 700 000 projected for the entire island are expected to reside in this region.

The priority given by the Indonesian government to Batam is evident from the setting up of three special agencies to oversee the island's development, an enviable position not given to any of the other 13 700 more islands throughout Indonesia. The most prominent agency is BIDA which has been given almost a free hand to steer Batam's industrial development. BIDA's Chairman, Prof Dr Ing. B.J. Habibie, is widely regarded as a brilliant technocrat personally drafted into the Indonesian Cabinet by President Suharto, to oversee the island's development.

### **Development with "Unlimited" Supplies of Workers**

Today, eight business groups have been given green light to develop industrial estates on Batam island. The proposed industrial estates vary in size from 20 to 500 hectares. These include the 20-hectare First Triangle Industrial Park at Tanjung Uncang; the 30-hectare Thomas Technology Park at Batam Centre; the Kabil and Tanjung Uncang industrial estates, at Kabil and Tanjung Uncang, covering 200 hectares; the 100-hectare Spinindo Industrial Area at Tanjung Uncang; the 350-hectare Seafont

Industrial City at Sagulung; the 365-hectare Kuang Hwa Industrial Zone at Kabil; and the 170-hectare Kabil Indonusa Estate which is designated for both light and heavy industries.

The centre-piece of Batam's industrial development is the S\$ 600 million Batam Industrial Park (BIP). This industrial park is a joint-venture between two Singapore government-owned companies, Singapore Technologies Industrial Corporation and Jurong Environmental Engineering, and the Salim Group, Indonesia's largest business conglomerate. An initial 500 hectares is being developed over the next five years with another 1000 hectares reserved for future development.

The development and management of BIP have been configured to provide total support services for hassle-free business start-ups. P.T. Batamindo Investment Corporation (BIC), incorporated in Jakarta, is responsible for developing the logistics, communications and other services to support the park's operations. Batamindo Industrial Management Pte Ltd (BIM), incorporated in Singapore, is responsible for the planning, designing and marketing of BIP; BIM will also manage the industrial estate and handle all logistics, manpower and licensing requirements of the park's tenants.

BIP, when completed, will provide employment and housing for 50 000 to 80 000 Indonesian workers. The current population of Batam, estimated at 100 000, is clearly insufficient to support the pace of industrial development on the island. Moreover, the local residents in Batam are mostly farmers and fishermen, without the requisite skills and "industrial discipline"

for work in the factories. The workers required to support the various industrial projects on the island have to be sourced from other parts of Indonesia, mainly from Java-Indonesia's most densely populated island.

The focus of this study is on the Indonesian workers recruited for the tenants at the BIP; in this instance, the task of sourcing the workers is relegated to Tunas Karya, an Indonesian-Singapore joint-venture based in Jakarta.

### **The Supply of Labour**

The number of unemployed people in Indonesia is high, close to what Lewis called an "unlimited supply of labour". The consist of the uneducated (illiterate); elementary school, junior and senior high school graduates, and even university graduates. From this pool of job seekers, Tunas Karya shortlisted only those with a minimum of senior high school (SMA) or equivalent qualifications (SMEA, STM).

The salaries for production operators start from S\$ 90 per month for the first three months, S\$ 100 per month for the next nine months and S\$ 115 per month for the second year. In addition, the workers are provided with meal allowances of S\$ 4 per day while training in Singapore. The workers are also provided with free accommodation and medical services. These workers are trained in Singapore before they start work in Batam. The training stints of 3 to 8 months are distinct attractions to prospective workers. There appears to be considerably more applicants than what the companies could absorb. This suggests that the employment package offered by Tunas Karya are sufficiently attractive.

## The Proville of the Workers

Since Batam and the surrounding islands are sparsely populated, and the educational levels of the local population are rather low, Tunas Karya has to recruit most of the workers from other parts of Indonesia. Table 1 shows the various sources of information for prospective job applicants, viz, Departement of Manpower, Bank Central Asia (BCA), P.T. Tunas Karya, newspapers, friends, and other sources. The most popular source of information appears to be newspaper advertisements, as indicated by 46% of the respondents. In contrast to this "modern" way of information dissemination, there is also the "traditional" channel of communication through friends which, in Javanese, is called "getok tular" method, i.e. "mouth-to-mouth news". This personal method is still used in the recruitment of illegal workers for plantations in Malaysia, and is still regarded as being effective. As much as 8% of the respondents identified friends and neighbours as their sources of information about Batam. The local offices of the Department of Manpower (Departemen Tenaga Kerja) is another major source of information on employment opportunities in Batam; in this case, for 31.5% of the respondents.

**Tabel 1. Sources of Job Information**

Sources of Information	Number of Respondents	(%)
Newspapers	229	46.0
Local offices of Manpower Dept.	157	31.5
Bank Central Asia	21	4.2
P.T. Tunas Karya	25	5.0
Friends	40	8.0
Other sources	23	4.6
No response	3	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The other information channels, such as BCA and Tunas Karya, were mentioned by about 4 to 5 % of the respondents.

The Javanese and Sundanese are well-known for their reluctance to leave their home villages. This is especially so with the older generation. This attitude is typically expressed in a world outlook among them : "We should get together whether we have something to eat or not" (*Mangan ora mangan waton kumpul*). Table 2 shows the origin of the workers according to the provinces of the birth place. The fact that many of the workers at BIP came from Java begs the question : is there a change in outlook ?

**Table 2. Home Provinces of Respondents**

Provinces	Number of workers	(%)
Jakarta	138	27.7
West Java	86	17.3
Central Java	69	13.9
Yogyakarta Special Region	31	6.2
East Java	8	1.6
Sumatra provinces	120	24.1
Other provinces	35	7.0
Not specified	11	2.2

About 39% of the respondents came from Java (excluding the Jakarta Capital Special Region). For many of them, Batam is a far away place unknown to their parents, or even to themselves. Yet, unlike their parents, they are willing to leave their home villages to seek employment elsewhere. The respondents' reasons for accepting work in Batam are varied : to become independent (*mandiri*), to get new experience, to supplement the family income, to see Singapore, to support the government program in developing Batam as an industrial area.

This is an interesting phenomenon in the sense that, unlike transmigration, this process of labour migration is a shift of resources from the traditional agricultural sector to the modern industrial sector. This structural transformation is, in the context of Indonesia's development aspirations, a change in the desired direction. Those who were attracted by the offer were not always SMA graduates, but also SMEA (*Sekolah Menengah Ekonomi Atas*, Economic Senior High School), STM (*Sekolah Teknik Menengah*, Technical Vocational School), D1-D3 (one to three year diploma program at university level), and other SMA equivalents. Table 3 shows the profile of workers in terms of education.

It is interesting to note that university graduates were also attracted to factory jobs in Batam. These jobs were clearly not designated for them. It is possible that they could not get job in their hometowns. However, on a more optimistic note, it is likely that, as the industries in Batam develop, more executive positions will be opened to these university graduates.

**Table 3. Highest Educational Level of Respondents**

Schools	Number of workers	(%)
SMA	352	70.7
SMEA	69	13.9
STM	17	3.4
D1-D3	30	6.0
University graduates	3	0.6
Others	27	5.4

Another interesting characteristic of the respondents is that most of them (70%) do not have any working experience. This may be gleaned from Table 4.

**Table 4. Working Experience of Respondents**

	Number	(%)
Have not worked before	354	71.1
Have worked before	135	27.1
Not specified	9	1.8

It appears that the employers prefer fresh and inexperienced workers. One possible explanation is that it is easier to inculcate industrial discipline and work ethics to those without prior working experience. In any case, the previous working experience may not be all that relevant to the kind of work they are having now.

Do these workers intend to stay on and work in Batam? This question is important for the companies as they need a continued supply of workers to sustain their manufacturing operations. For the moment, it is not possible to gauge what are the plans of the respondents at the end of their two-year contracts.

**Table 5. Plans After Termination of Contract**

Plan	Number of workers	(%)
Renew the contract with the same company	75	15.1
Move to another company in Batam	0	0
Go back home	32	6.4
Wait and see	358	71.9
Others	29	5.8
Not specified	4	0.8

As shown in Table 5 above, most of the respondents (71.9%) are adopting a "wait-and-see" attitude; for these respondents, important considerations would in-

clude the salaries offered after their two years of working experience, the prospects for promotion, family and/or marriage, employment opportunities elsewhere (including in their home village or towns); etc. In any case, it is too early for the respondents to think seriously about renewing their employment contracts as they just started work in Batam. Interestingly, though, none of the respondents indicated a change of employment to another company in Batam; this reflects, to an extent, a sense of loyalty to the companies they belong to.

The lure of going back home is always great, especially for those who left the home village for the first time. So, there is always the possibility that these workers would return home if there are employment opportunities there. To what extent is this the case? Table 6 offers an indication of the intention of the respondents, if indeed, there are employment opportunities at home.

**Table 6. Plan If There Are Employment Opportunities At Home**

	Number of workers	(%)
Would go back	80	16.1
Would not go back	57	11.4
Wait and see	349	70.1
Not specified	12	2.4

About 16% of the respondents indicated that they would like to return to their home towns and villages if there are job opportunities. A more interesting observation is, even at this early stage, at least 11% of the respondents have decided not to return home even if they are offered employment. This pioneering group of workers could perhaps be identified and groomed

to take on more responsible positions in the factories in Batam.

The workers who were employed were the lucky ones. They have been selected from thousands of applicants. When asked whether there might be others who were willing to work in Batam, they gave a wide range of response. Table 7 shows the number of workers saying "there are many", "there are a few", "does not exist", and "don't know".

**Table 7. Number of Respondents Reporting on the Existence of Prospective Workers in Their Home Villages**

Those saying :	Number of workers	(%)
There are many	235	47.2
There a few	34	6.8
Does not exist	21	4.2
Don't know	151	30.3
Not specified	57	11.4

Almost half of the respondents indicated that "there are many" who were seeking employment in Batam. This is a reflection of the fact that there was large pool of unemployed people in Indonesia, or simply, that the incentives given to workers in Batam are more attractive than in the other parts of Indonesia, or both. More than 85% of the respondents indicated that they were willing to help others to get jobs in Batam if they were approached by their companies.

### Some Lessons from The Project

This is a simple, but informative, survey. We can draw insights from this study which might be applicable to other areas in Indonesia. For instance, it is a well known fact that the Indonesian population is uncequally distributed. Since the Dutch

colonial days, various types of transmigration have been attempted, and yet population imbalance persists. The Interregional Labour Force Scheme (*Angkatan Kerja Antar Daerah* or AKAD) for plantations outside Java has also been implemented with limited results. However, it appears that the BIP-type of manpower recruitment has the potential, not only to alleviate the problems of unemployment, but also to redress related problems such as population imbalance in Indonesia.

There are several advantages to this method of manpower recruitment over and above transmigration. Firstly, unlike transmigration, the employment creation process is interregional, and intersectoral. The workers not only leave the densely populated areas of Java for scarcely populated Riau, but they also move away from the traditional agricultural sector to the modern industrial sector. Thus, unlike transmigration which involves moving poverty from one place to another, the BIP-type of migration is definitely not the case. The workers would have done their calculations (e.g. salaries, fringe benefits, etc) before leaving their home towns and villages. The agricultural sector in Java, Bali and several provinces in Sumatra are already overcrowded; the marginal physical product of the agricultural workers is approaching zero. The BIP-type of migration will raise the incomes of the Indonesian workers.

Secondly, the BIP-type of employment creation does not need a lot of space for each and every person. In a typical transmigration programme, a family of five is provided with only two hectares of land. An area of 500 hectares could accommo-

date around 250 families or 1,250 persons under a transmigration project, whereas this same land area could accommodate around 15,250 persons under industrial projects such as BIP. Moreover, friction between the newcomers and the local population would be less likely as the BIP-type of industrial projects do not require that much land area, relatively speaking.

Thirdly, in transmigration, the government expects the migrants to become entrepreneurs who bear the risk and uncertainty of their business ventures. Not all farmers are risk lovers; most of them are risk averse. In the BIP-type of employment, the workers do not have to bear such risks. Although these workers are employees, their incomes are high enough that they are even obliged to pay taxes.

Fourthly, the cost of recruitment and settlement of workers to the government in the BIP-type of employment creation programme is relatively low. This is because private sector companies bear most of the costs of infrastructural development within the industrial townships. In marked contrast, for transmigration projects, the government must budget not only for the cost of recruitment and settlement, estimated at US\$ 16,000 per family (at late 1980s' price levels) in the Bengkulu, Jambi, West and South Sumatra *bedol desa* project, but also for the cost of living for several years.

Finally, from a sociological perspective, industrial projects such as the BIP will broaden the horizon of workers and signal to Indonesians that employment opportunities exist outside their home towns and villages.

It may not be fair to compare the

large scale transmigration projects throughout Indonesia with the more modest attempts at employment creation in Batam. Indonesia must create dozens of the BIP-type of employment scheme in order to absorb the present level and rate of unemployment and underemployment in the country. Nonetheless, we can learn from the BIP experience that there is certainly another way to alleviate population unbalance and unemployment at the same time.

### The Future Prospect

The developments in Batam are too recent for an evaluation. The BIP started recruiting workers in 1990. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the operational bottlenecks, social issues and political sensitivities that have already surfaced in the Batam experiment. However, the very speed with which the developments in Batam have unfolded is itself evidence of the commitment of the governments of Indonesia and Singapore to translate the Batam-Singapore connection of the Growth Triangle into an economic reality. It is ASEAN cooperation in action. If this project succeeds, ASEAN could create other growth triangles or rectangles, as for example, a northern growth triangle incorporating North Sumatra, North Malaysia, and South Thailand, or perhaps even a growth triangle spanning Indonesia's North Kalimantan, Malaysia's Sabah and Mindanao in the Philippines.

### Conclusion

This study is only preliminary. Various aspects of life in Batam must be studied and monitored by the three participating

countries. Set within the context of a large country, with a population of over 180 million, the industrial and other projects in Batam may not impact that significantly on employment levels in Indonesia. Nevertheless, the BIP-type of employment creation can serve as a model for developing other parts of Indonesia, providing employment to the unemployed and underemployed, creating indirect employment and other spin offs as well as generating extra tax revenues and foreign exchange. Importantly, the BIP experiment symbolises the determined efforts of two neighbouring countries, Indonesia and Singapore, in combining their resources, experience and expertise to create - for both countries - a competitive edge to attract international investments.

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