

## **The Conflict Of “SAD” With Plantation Company And Its Implication: A Study In 5 Villages In The Muara Jambi Regence**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this research was to explain Suku Anak Dalam (SAD) conflict with plantation companies by involving NGOs and local elites. This conflict of natural resources has implications for the loss of SAD livelihoods, which has led to social inequality between SAD and the community of migrant workers and plantation company workers. The research was used ethnography method, focusing on community's effort in organizing its social, economy, politics and cultural livelihood, and apply such pattern culture in the inhabitants' daily lives. Data analysis was conducted through interactive approach combined with participative analysis technique. With this approach, the result of data collection during the research is analyzed interpretatively. The results of these studied were: the most crucial conflict issue is land dispute between SAD community with the company, specifically in Tanjung Lebar, and Bukit Makmur villages. Both villages have plan and organized the occupation of company's property and have been given permission by the government and security. There is the tendency that SAD as an ethnic identity have been 'sold' by the village elites and SAD's own public figure, be it to maintain the relationship with the government and the company. The involvement of groups of interests (NGOs) assisting SAD in the conflict against the company. SAD conflict has involved numerous of people, including local transmigrants, and it doesn't seem to stop since uncontrolled land occupation will not solve any problem. There is the tendency that the government has difficulties in abridging the conflict and to look for solutions.*

**Keywords:** *Conflict, local government, plantation companies, local elite, social inequality*

## A. BACKGROUND

Human intervention towards a particular environment will put a tension in the surrounding. Some examples of interventions are land clearing by plantation companies, or mining of gas and fossil fuels. In result, there will be social impact in the society itself and it is very important to be aware of. It is also important to know how society responds the new condition of environment impacting directly to the forest, in this case, including Suku Anak Dalam (SAD) community that had been pioneering at the Some very first.

Conflict is most likely to occur where local communities have been systematically excluded from decision-making processes, when the economic benefits are concentrated in the hands of a few, when the burdens associated with extractive industries clash with local, social, cultural, religious and environmental norms, or align with pre-existing tensions. The price paid by societies threatened by, undergoing or emerging from natural resource-related violence is evident in the lives lost or touched by conflict, and amplified by fractured relationships, weakened institutions and destroyed infrastructure.<sup>69</sup>

The clearings for palm oil plantations have changed the relations between the society and the nature. Should other corporations enter, it is most likely that such society would be cornered and even the access to become the member of company's workforce would be limited. Not to mention the environmental impact that may cause and how benefiting it

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<sup>69</sup> Refer to Report of The EU-UN Partnership on Land, Natural Resources and Conflict Prevention, <http://www.un.org/en/land-natural-resources-conflict/extractive-industries.shtml>

would be should mining operates in populated area, especially the one inhabited by SAD.

Therefore, social structure needs to be assessed, be it in terms of economy, the dynamics of local politics, and the relation between SAD with any other groups of interest outside the community, especially the city's elites of politics. It is important also to determine the kind of issues to unite both elites of city' and village's. In result, we could understand the structure of social relation between both elites in the regency or provincial government. The same goes to SAD community, having eco-political interest in dealing with both local and government elites.

The community's existence has been gone through long periods of process throughout the history of Indonesia. SAD community has always been the focus of government's attention since Dutch colonialism, Japanese occupancy, up to the period of National Independence. Culturally, SAD is considered as 'estranged', hence the numerous events and programs to empower this community, both ex situ and in situ. Yet, they have not significantly improving.

## **B. OBJECTIVE OF RESEARCH**

1. To analyze the behavior of local elites, along with the conflict and its potentials within community and the stakeholders, and with the companies
2. To map the relations between SAD's social networking outside NGOs, or any other groups of interest
3. To analyze society's perception, group of interests and NGOs towards the company establishment

4. To formulate major conflict issues and its implication, recommend the policies, and social communication strategies between company and SAD community.

#### **D. RESEARCH METHODS**

The research was used ethnography method, focusing on community's effort in organizing its social, economy, politics and cultural livelihood and apply such pattern culture in the inhabitants' daily lives, including how they connected with related parties (stakeholder). Research in the corridor of community culture is conducted using both ethic and emic approach. Based on such scheme, the investigated phenomenon will be interpreted to formulate feasible responses that could be applied on SAD community, government, and the company.

Data was collected through observation and in-depth interview. Later on, the results are combined with the data gained from documentation study. Some literature documents, specifically the ones related to the research, would be one of the data sources. Data analysis was conducted through interactive approach combined with participative analysis technique. With this approach, the result of data collection during the research is analyzed interpretatively. Researchers are continuously conducting the process of interpreting based on predetermined mind frame. Data check and recheck to the informants will always be done through snowball scheme.

Another analysis is participative model. This approach emphasizes on the involvement of community members to discuss and analyze their problems. This model based on grounded approach as an analyzing tool. The

keywords are involving community members and place them on significant position so the community would actively assess the important process.

The research area includes 5 villages, namely Bukit Makmur Menandai Pinang Tinggi Tanjung Sari and Tanjung Lebar Village. All of these villages are in Jambi Muara District, Jambi Province.

## **E. STRATEGIST CONFLICT ISSUES AND IMPLICATION**

### **1. BUKIT MAKMUR VILLAGE**

There is a crucial issue between SAD community in Bukit Makmur village with Asiatic Persada company. SAD is still asking the company to fulfill their promise in handing out 650 Ha of land to the community, following the agreement that signed by their representatives and witnessed by the Regent of Batang Hari. SAD accuses PT Asistic Persada of breaching the contract and it has been going on for dozen of years. Taking over the land means impoverishing SAD community, structurally and systematically. In a nutshell, it can be said that SAD community does not have land anymore except for a piece of back and/or front yard, while the forest that used to be their main source of livelihood has turned into a very extensive palm oil plantations owned by the company and transmigrants. Flora and fauna that used to meet the needs of SAD people and becoming their necessities has been vanished, along with ecological changing in which the forest becomes palm oil plantations.

This condition has forced the people of SAD to look for a way out in making their living that is also considered as unethical, which is picking up bunches of palm fruits to sell, or becoming wage labors. Mustar, the Chief in Penyerokan, even stated that some of his people have to steal only to live. It

is almost unbearable to them because not only they have been deprived from their main source of living while the alternative is almost none for they have limited human resource. On the other hand, the company owns extremely extensive lands. Even some of these people are already literate, generally their kids don't go to school because financial limitation and distance. The nearest school is quite far from their settlements, within and outside the area of palm oil plantation.

SAD community has gone through all of the legal process to get back their 650 ha of land, in conform to the agreement with the company a decade ago. In the end, after 27 times of trials and courts, they are lost with the reason of mistakenly gone to the wrong institution in filing the case. According to the Judge, they should not file it to Muaro Jambi Law Court, but go to Batanghari Regency instead, where PT Asiatic Persada runs the business, whereas their settlement situated in Sungai Bahar Sub-district, Muaro Jambi Regency. Due to budget constraint to further process the case that they cannot afford, they decided not to continue the case. Even the Legal Aid Agency assisting the Community for few years has no longer continue the process.

Even if SAD discontinued the case doesn't mean that the problem solved. It is only subsidies. They are more than aware that justice institution is frequently favoring the strong, economically and politically. Though the Chief has promised not to take vandalize action, they bear the grudge towards the company. It is an accumulated grudge that could be exploded in no time at all once they gather the strength, should there no alternative provided, or their way to seek justice stuck.

A lot of people in SAD community have difficulty in making their living. Not only because of limited natural resources, but also their access to work in industrial sector is minimum. This condition takes more attention so there won't be any negligence from the government in whatsoever, considering the authorities should become the frontline in materializing the people's welfare and guarantee the living of these impoverished citizens. Social assistance through PNPM Mandiri program is not sufficient for them, considering its temporary nature. The most feasible policy is providing them land, because they already skilled in managing palm oil plantation. It is similar with the transmigrants villagers in Sumatera who came from Java and/or any other places, or local transmigrants. The Head of the Village of Bukit Makmur also admits this dilemmatic situation, because newer settler obtained 2.5 ha of land complete with certificate of ownership while SAD people who inhabited the land far generations have none.

Land dispute between both SAD community in this village and Tanjung Lebar with PT Asiatic Persada has been troubled administratively. True, the disputed land is situated in the border between Muaro Jambi Regency and Batanghari Regency. Most of the plantations and processing manufacturer of PT Asiatic Persada allocated in Batanghari with business permit issued by the same regency. Yet, even the SAD settlements situated in Sungai Beruang Sub-village of Tanjung Labar are also claimed as under Batanghari jurisdiction. But all of its government administrative affairs, including educational facility assistance—in this case is school building—are contribution from Muaro Jambi Regency.

The 10 years of waiting is not a short period, and all of the attempts to get the land back from the company is fruitless, hence the rage. Now SAD

community takes over 650 ha of land that the company once promised. Peaceful land occupation has been granted permission from both local and village government. Early in January 2012 there have been meetings to support the action, between village figures, SAD community, village administrative, police, local government, and some NGOs such as SETARA and CAPPA. Those NGOs also involving few foreigners from Germany to survey the displacement location in Beruang River where SAD community used to reside.

There are some strategies of SAD people to take over their land. First, they will involve all people from their community of 750 families from 4 villages in Bukit Makmur, Markanding, Pinang Tinggi and Tanjung Lebar. Second, they set Saturday, 21 January 2012, as the time when land occupation begins by erecting tents in their own locations. Third, they will send the letters to the government and the police to settle their case with the company. Fourth, if they don't get any response, they would start to do *berondolan* (collecting palm oil seeds) and harvesting the plantations to meet their living needs.

Inspiration of occupying the land comes from the TV, specifically about Mesuji case in Lampung and the one happens in South Sumatera. Mr. Mustar, SAD Chief in Penyerokan, stated that they witness the violence broadcasted in national TV and ILC (Indonesia Lawyer Club) program in TV One discussing human rights violation involving plantation company, police, and villagers. The program had given them insight to take over the land that had been annexed for more than a decade. Thus, it is safe to say that extensive information access among the villagers and SAD community have greatly contributing to spread the ideas of changing and struggle from our



own society. This is reasonable since all of SAD communities in the research area could watch the TV through parabola antenna. Not only that, they also own generator set for the people who have not benefiting from electricity.

## **2. MARKANDING VILLAGE**

Isolated location is the strategic conflict issue in Dusun I, or commonly known as Bunut. According to Mr. Jas, the Head of neighborhood structural in this sub-village, Markanding is geographically situated in Bunut. But after autonomy regulation that makes Bunut into Markanding and Pinang Tinggi village, this sub-village has drown further. The major cause for this occurrence is that the access road to Unit 10—transmigrants settlement—is cut. Previously, this road has become the boulevard early in the 90s. This issue has been complained by the villagers, mostly belong to SAD community. To say the least, two bridges have badly damaged. These bridges connect Markanding and Dusun I Bunut with the distance of 2.5 Km.

The implication of the isolated community in Markanding is the lag in eco-social development in the society. Besides, the service provided by the village government is very minimum, whereas it used to be the center of the village. Next implication is constraint in religious activities and village facilities. A small mosque that used to serve as a place of worship has turned into a house. So does the Head of the Village's office that turns into a house for an ex Head in the 90's who comes from Central Java.

Another basic issue in Markanding is the minimum performance of village instruments. The major cause is because the Head, Alatas, who is a SAD descendant, spends more time in his home, in the area of PT Asiatic Persada plantation situated in Bajubang sub-district, Batanghari Regency. He

is one of the foremen in the most conflicting company with his own community. Meanwhile, the village secretary, Rika Kurniati Nasution, is also working as an agricultural counsel in PTPN VI. As a result, public service for the villagers are neglected, even though there are Head of Affairs and administration staffs who could take over the roles of those two high-ranked village instruments.

Markanding shows itself more as the real, heterogeneous village, because the Head is a SAD descendant and most of the inhabitants work as a farmer and own the land. Its settlement is also a company housing complex, or known as its Dutch term *Afdeling*. The villagers are also heterogeneous in terms of occupation, such as farmer, businessperson, and employees in PTPN. Thus, not only they work in plantation sector owned by PTPN, a lot of the inhabitants also have other business such as restaurant, grocery store, trading, service, and farm worker. This situation indicates that Markanding is more dynamic and more open. There are also public pool and fishing ponds owned by Pak Ramona, ex manager of PTPN VI who was in charge for 3 units of *Pabrik Kelapa Sawit* (PKS—Palm Oil Processing) in Sungai Bahar.

This village that used to be called Bunut is also a place for PTPN retirees that are no longer lodge in the company's dorm. Pak Anwar, for instance, has retired from PTPN and about 5 years ago determined to settle in Kampung Bunut rather than back to his hometown, Medan. He pioneers the opening of PTPN VI road that is later on be used for transmigration land all over Sungai Bahar sub-district. That is why he is famous among Javanese transmigrants in Sungai Bahar. But after the transmigrants settlements gained more population and some of them had achieving success, Pak Anwar admits that he no longer known or knows them. One of the problem faced by

this retiree is not only the gap between transmigrants farmer and local settler, but also with PTPN retirees without extensive palm oil plantation with the ones who have small piece of land.

Markanding is the first and the oldest village, seen from the old house that used to serve as the village hall, and the tomb of their ancestor *Datuk Buyut* named Penghulu Jonggang. There are a lot of settlers come from Java and Sekayu in Markanding, where they mingle and resulted in culture contact. Thus, it is no wonder that SAD people is fluent in speaking Javanese and Sekayu.

Problem in education in Bunut has attracted great attention since they have learned from their elders. For instance, Alatas as the Head who is a SAD descendant cannot read nor write, and he is greatly assisted by the village secretary in running the wheel of governance. Alatas' kids are studying in Elementary and in Junior High. Nurjanah, a teacher, express her high hope for the local people to get assistance in building Early Childhood Education establishment because there are a lot of children are still playing all day.

### **3. PINANG TINGGI VILLAGE**

The hot issue in Pinang Tinggi is land distribution that PT. Asiatic Persada promised to the SAD community in Tenggalung as the SAD settlement concentration. According to Saiful who posts as a secretary BPD Pinang Tinggi, there are 29 families of SAD who already have their land allocation for palm oil plantation in Durian Dangkal sub-village. They get 1.25 ha per family who is SAD descendant in Tenggalung. Non-SAD family with the mother from SAD community also gets the same land allotment.

Meanwhile, there are dozens of SAD people in Tenggara who haven't got the allotment. Saiful stated that the list of their names had been proposed to the company and the government, but long and winding bureaucratic process constraint them to follow it. The ones who get the land are those who diligently follow the track. This might be the potential cause of the conflict, both between the SAD people and with the company. Those who don't get the land are the ones occupying the plantation area of PT Asiatic Persada in Durian Dangkal, Bungku, Bajubang sub-district. One of the informants from Durian Dangkal says that 200 people occupying the land by erecting the tents and huts inside the plantation area.

Nonetheless, in conform to the checking on field, the land allotment for SAD people are not distinct in terms of borders, not only among the fellow SAD people but also with the company. One of the informants stated that they are not orderly following the distribution, so that some people have more than he should have. So does the process of palm oil harvesting. SAD community harvest is overlapping with the one the company harvest. It could trigger more conflict if the case is not settled well.

Social living in SAD community resides in Tenggara have also mingled with outside settlers, such as marriage between SAD member with the people of Bugis, Makasar and Javanese (Head of Tenggara sub-village) ethnics. SAD area behind the palm oil company has not socializing much with the people work in the company. In this area, SAD community hasn't touched by the outsiders much because internally they are not too enthusiastic in changing their way of social living. Besides, they are not too friendly with strangers who come to their place. Education has attracted SAD parents'

attention, but they face the obstacle of bullying from outside community so that the indigenous are ashamed to go to school.

SAD community in Tenggaling has closely befriended numerous technology media of communication and information, specifically mobile phone and TV. Some of them turn on the generation set on daytime only to watch television. It is more interesting that one of the SAD's bachelors has made mobile phone as a tool to get to know a girl from Bugis descendant and married later on (2010).

For now there has not any NGOs originated from local area. The situation based on the lack of any emerging issue or crucial problem in the village, unlike the ones occurred in Bukit Makmur and Tanjung Lebar. Nonetheless, in particular condition there would be external NGO collecting the inhabitants' and SAD's data in Tenggaling. The presence NGO, therefore, is only 'conditional', for instance when village electoral is coming up.

#### **4. TANJUNG SARI VILLAGE**

In this area, there are three strategic issues at the very least. First is the land dispute between the inhabitants and PT Bahar Pasific—headquartered in Jambi—as an industrial forest company. The conflict has legally processed, but the Head of the Village, Pak Buchori, has quieted the case down. Initially, the company demanded the people who had occupied the land to acknowledge its legal status as business property, asking them to leave immediately. Yet, the occupiers, mostly transmigrants, refused the demand because they had planted palm oil trees on the location. As a result, the company filed a report to the authority.

Conflict potential is not only with PT Bahar Pasific but also with the giant company PT Asiatic Persada. Half of the lands owned by the villagers are still claimed as the company's property. According to Buchori, the claimed area has turned into buildings and public infrastructure in the center of Tanjung Sari Village, such as village office, mosque, school, and market. True, conflict potential lies under the surface, yet it never comes up, unlike the conflict between SAD communities in other villages. This is probably caused by the fact that the people have owned the certificate to the land claimed by the company. And another fact is that the authority that places them on location is the local government itself, with the permission also given by the Bureau of Land and Forestry and central government.

A village that is considered as prosperous and harmonious, it is most likely that the information about oil and gas mining establishment in the area will not face significant obstacle should such information is well communicated. Not only the inhabitants having open natures, the village instruments are also well-performed and reliable in terms of negotiating with the company. Yet, the anticipation towards bargaining position still needs consideration, since they already have sufficient amount of land so that they could calculate the benefit they will get from the company. Therefore, it is not without reason that some of the villagers asking for IDR 50 million compensation for the company to do soil sampling.

## **5. TANJUNG LEBAR VILLAGE**

The most crucial conflict issue was displacement of SAD community in RT 13, Sungai Beruang village, took place on 17 August 2011. About 35 semi-permanent houses have been bulldozed, guarded heavily by 30 mobile

brigade platoons ‘hired’ by PT Asiatic Persada. The trigger was not coming from SAD community, but from Musi Banyuasin inhabitants settling in the area. A villager named Zainal has been suspected of stealing the palm oil fruits from PT Asiatic and fully filled a pick up truck with it, which later on he sold to a palm oil processing manufacturer that is also under the management of PT Asiatic. Zainal’s thoughtless act has resulted in the settlement’s displacement, and the other villagers are hit and threaten by rifles. This resulted in some people being hurt while the others are apprehended by the military, while the houses are bulldozed down. They still insist to stay on the location, under the tents provided by some NGOs that cares about the SAD community.

The land around the place where the riot takes place is also disputed. While PT Asitic stating the land as its property, SAD community insists to acknowledge it as their ancestors’ land. Based on their statement, their ancestors have been living there and clearing the land to farm long before they reside in Tanjung Lebar village, proved by durian trees planted by the elders. In Sungai Beruang sub-district, there is even old cemetery used by SAD community, long before PT Asiatic Persada’s permit issued by the government.

The cases of displacement and land dispute seem to go through long and winding road, because—aside from the publication—SAD community are also protesting before the State’s Palace and reporting the case to Human Rights Commission. This institution has also responded and ready to investigate the location to find the fact should there be any rights violation. And that has become the reason why the people are still struggling to stay though there is already a checkpoint on the location. They live in the tents

provided by State's Social Agency of Muaro Jambi Regency. There is even a banner in front of the big tent, with inscription "*Korban Penggusuran*" (Victim of Displacement). The incident has become a nightmare for SAD community. They have become the victim of capitalistic power in the field of palm oil companies. This would become a black history for the next generations that will always be remembered as the lost of marginalized people against economic development. If social communication between the company and SAD people is not improving, there will be offensive struggle should this traditional community gather their resources and fight back. Some NGOs have put their efforts to be on the frontline of this struggle, such as Cappa, to fight for the compensation and the returning of the land as their rights.

It seems that the effort of the people, specifically SAD, to fight back their rights have been inspired by more people who are more courageous to stand against plantation companies, even if they have to go the hard way. The source of such inspiration is not only coming from South Sumatera, such as on Sodong River, Mesuji sub-district, and from Lampung in Mesuji Regency, but also coming from Jambi.

Besides, local government also seems to take side to the people who are being lied to and lost from the manager of the company. Both local government and the people have enough sweet promises saying that the company will return the land. For more than a decade since the agreement signed, such promise has never accomplished. For instance, the representatives from the local government, the company, and SAD community had already signed the agreement of compensation for 650 ha of land on Bukit Makmur village, since 2002.



There is no local NGOs from the village. Yet there is involvement of other NGOs such as CAPP, SETARA, YLBHL, Peduli Bangsa, WALHI, AGRA, FMN, and Perkumpulan Hijau (PH). Some of which have helped the villagers, specifically SAD people of RT 13 Sei Beruang sub-village, at Sei Buayan (or sometimes called as Sei Durian and Danau Minang) that have gone through land dispute with Sawit Asiatic company.

Those LSM focus on agricultural and human rights justice have already gone through the effort to find the solution of the conflict between SAD Sei Beruang with PT Asiatic after the event, such as sending letter of complaint about the violence against SAD community to RSPO as the body of the world's complaint for Mr. Jan Kees Vis as the President of RSPO, Mr. Darrel Weber as the General Secretary of RSPO, and Executive Board of RSPO as the Panel for Complaints and Facilitator for Land Dispute Resolution.

In relation with the conflict, NGOs SAD-assisting NGOs have their interest in helping the conflict resolution. It is hopeful that SAD people could regain their rights of the ancestors' land and the company would give compensation and provide them settlement so they could back to their normal living like before, having shelter, source of living, and preserve SAD's local wisdom.

Given the strategic issues as mentioned above, the oil and gas company that needs to operate in the area should anticipate conflict potential to prevent unfair socio-economical relation as stated by the sample of palm oil company all these times. Another item that needs anticipation is land status that will shift from the company to SAD community.

There are two possibilities from the shifting land ownership. First, there will be difficulties faced by the corporate to negotiate with the people

in terms of land usage of their property, specifically with compensation system. Second, it would be easier for the corporate should these two events occurred: 1) compensate directly, and 2) no intervention of the third party or involvement of groups of interest such as NGOs and local government in whatsoever. Second situation seems inevitable for corporation (COPI). This statement is without reason, since the land—specifically after the reform era—land has entering the arena of eco-political power relation between civilians, government, and business.<sup>70</sup>

## **F. CONCLUSION AND REKOMENDATION**

- Land distribution for the settlers has completed with certificates, and this caused social gap between SAD people with transmigrant farmers. So did socio-economy gap between SAD with employees of plantation companies.
- The most crucial issue is land dispute between SAD community with the company, specifically in Beruang River, Tanjung Lebar, and Penyerokan sub-district, Bukit Makmur. Both villages have plan and organized the occupation of company's property and have been given permission by the government and security.
- There is the tendency that SAD as an ethnic identity have been 'sold' by the village elites and SAD's own public figure, be it to maintain the relationship with the government and the company and to any other parties that feel sympathy for SAD.

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<sup>70</sup> The complexity of this pattern of relations can be proved theoretically in the book Kartodiharjo and Jhamtani, *The Politics of Environment and Power in Indonesia*. Ford Foundation-Equinox Publishing, Jakarta-Singapore, 2003: 62-103.

- Educational and working gaps between the settlers and the natives (SAD). SAD people are frequently lost in the competition to get the job in PTPN. They view the job opportunity have been dominated by particular ethnic.
- The involvement of groups of interests (NGOs) assisting SAD in the conflict against the company is to abridge conflict resolution between two disputed parties.
- There is the tendency that the government has difficulties in abridging the conflict and to look for solutions, hence the negligence when SAD people and the villagers occupying the company's property. This way of resolution will only prolonging the problem.

The results of this study can be recommended as follows:

- The company should take great caution in entering the conflict area because it is possible that the conflict will go wider. To clarify ownership certificate towards the land that later on be used as an operating property to mitigate the risk of conflict and anticipate the solution.
- Involvement of NGOs focusing on environment, human rights and land justice will help the company in approaching various elements of society, so that the company will be accepted and understood as one of the economic opportunity to the people.
- It is very significant to understand the main issue and the parties in the conflicting arena, along with the main actors from corporate, individuals, or groups of interests. Then, Social communication through dialogue needs to be emphasized before operating a company, including the possibility in developing continuous CSR program.

- Empowerment program is better not to be just lip service or social seatbelt, but real and continuous program. Therefore, there would be local human resources in the long run that will strengthen the corporate presence.

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