

Migrant worker returns home after 18 years

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The return of Parinah, 50, after nearly two decades of allegedly being held captive by her employers overseas has highlighted a lack of government oversight that could leave Indonesian migrants prone to abuse.

Despite improved regulations to safeguard workers from exploitation, the government still lacks an effective mechanism to monitor the working and living conditions of citizens employed abroad.

Parinah, a resident of Petarangan village in Banyumas, Central Java, left her husband and children to work as a domestic helper in Saudi Arabia in 1999.

After working in the Middle Eastern kingdom for about four years, she followed her employer to London. It was then that Parinah's family lost all contact with the mother of three.

In January, more than 18 years after Parinah left her village, her family received a letter from her asking them to help her come home. The letter included the London address of Parinah's employers.

According to Parinah's son, Parsin, 33, the migrant worker explained in her letter that she had not been allowed to leave her employer's house, let alone return to Indonesia. She also expressed how much she missed her children and longed to be with them.

"I reported the matter to the immigration office in Cilacap [Central Java] and asked for suggestions on how we could help my mother," Parsin told journalists on Sunday. "We were urged to contact the Banyumas Manpower Agency."

Indonesian authorities then stepped in to track down Parsinah's whereabouts. Cooperating



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Reunited: Indonesian migrant worker Parinah (left), who lost contact with her family 18 years ago, hugs her eldest daughter upon her homecoming to Nisawungu village, Cilacap regency, Central Java, on April 12. Leaving for Saudi Arabia in 1999 as a migrant worker, Parinah had not been heard from for 18 years before UK police reportedly saved her on March 1 from what they called modern slavery.

with the Metropolitan Police and the Sussex Police, officials from the Indonesian Embassy in London found and rescued Parinah last week.

She arrived in Jakarta on Thursday, where she was greeted with tears of joy by her children and family members.

Parinah went home with her 25-year-old daughter Sunarti, who was only 7 when her mother left for Saudi Arabia. Sunarti now lives with her husband in Nisawungu village, Cilacap regency.

"I am happy to be home [...]. After years of dreaming about going home, it is finally fulfilled. *Alhamdulillah* [thank God]," Parinah said.

Parinah's case is the latest on a long list of abuse cases involving Indonesian migrant workers.

Only two months ago, Adelina Lisao, a migrant worker from East Nusa Tenggara, died after allegedly being tortured by her employers in Penang, Malaysia.

Data from the Agency for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers' (BNP2TKI) shows that from January 2011 to January 2018, 60 percent of Indonesian migrant workers are women.

The high migration flow of female migrant workers has been in line with rampant abuse cases against those workers, Migrant CARE said in a statement released in early March.

"In 2017, 84 percent of cases received by Migrant CARE were female migrant worker cases related to human trafficking, flawed work contracts and documents,

insurance problems and unpaid salary," the statement said, asserting that these problems showed that female migrant workers remained prone to exploitation in unsafe working conditions.

Banyumas Manpower Agency official Agus Widodo confirmed that Parinah worked as a domestic helper for an Egyptian family in Saudi Arabia in 1999. In 2004, Parinah was brought by her employer to the UK.

"We are working to help Parinah receive her rights. She worked for [nearly two decades] but was never paid. We are cooperating with the Indonesian Embassy in London. We have also been informed that the embassy is handling the legal process of Parinah's employer in London," Agus said.