

The Sandwich Generation Phenomenon, Miserable Life under Capitalism

News:

More than 50 million Indonesians of productive age belong to the “sandwich” generation. They are under the economic burden of having to support their children and at the same time support the needs of the generation above them. The portrait of the Indonesian sandwich generation was captured in a Kompas Research and Development poll on August 9-11, 2022. The results of the poll showed that 67 percent of respondents claimed to bear the burden of being the sandwich generation. If it is proportional to the productive age population in Indonesia, which amounts to 206 million people, it is estimated that there are 56 million people who fall into the sandwich generation category. In terms of age, the Indonesian sandwich generation is spread across all generations, the largest proportion is in the Y generation group (24-39 years old), which is 43.6 percent, followed by generation X (40-55 years) at 32.6 percent. The sandwich generation was also found at 16.3 percent among Generation Z (less than 24 years old) who were young workers.

Tantan Hermansah, a sociologist from the Jakarta State Islamic University, said the accumulated pressure experienced by the sandwich generation could explode into social frustration. The fate of the sandwich generation in Indonesia, especially those with low incomes, is very concerning. They are forced by circumstances to toil like machines - without ever achieving a sufficient level of well-being. Their income is depleted to meet the basic needs of their family and extended family. They have no room to save or invest. In fact, some of them do not have the recreational funds to run away from the fatigue of life. At the same time, they are witnessing exhibitions of lavish lifestyles on social media that stimulate fun and hedonism. Naturally, the sandwich generation is close to the phenomenon of social frustration.

Comment:

The term sandwich generation is a form of expression that reflects social frustration due to the crush of the economic burden in Indonesia. This phenomenon also represents that the economic life is getting more difficult while the invasion of liberal values is also getting more and more violent in attacking the lifestyle of the Muslim community.

The application of the capitalist economic system in many Islamic countries has indeed forced many Muslim families to focus only on the struggle to meet the basic needs of their families due to the inequality and poverty that this kufr system continues to maintain. The promotion of secular materialism values has also affected the quality of social interaction and dehumanized family relationships to become “transactional”. For example, children are investments, parents are ATM machines, or children's education costs must be 'returned' with income from children's work. The 'transactional' nature of the capitalist lifestyle has poisoned many Muslim families plus the increasingly difficult economic conditions due to neo-liberal state policies such as fuel prices hikes.

Unfortunately, some financial experts in Indonesia say that the cause of the sandwich generation is more to the failure of the previous generation in planning sustainable financial security for the next generation. This kind of analysis tends to be partial and has the potential to cause negative sentiments (blaming each other) between generations. On the contrary, the cause cannot stop at the family level, but it is broader and fundamental, as the presence of the state to provide the people.

The causes of the Sandwich generation phenomenon in Indonesia are actually twofold, namely (1) a consumptive lifestyle due to the value order of secularism - materialism and (2) the weak role of the state in ensuring the basic needs of its people due to the implementation of the capitalist economic system. The Qur'an has in fact warned of the narrowness of the life of the people (*ma'ṣyat[an] ḍanka*) - if people turn away from Allah's warning, they would not find happiness, their chests are narrow because of their error. ﴿وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى﴾ ***“But whoever turns away from My Reminder will certainly have a miserable life, then We will raise them up blind on the Day of Judgment.”*** [Surat Tāhā [20]: 124].

It is clear that the hardships experienced by today's generation are the result of modern economic colonization by the West, as a result of our negligence in abandoning Islamic rules in all aspects of life. The state is negligent in meeting the basic needs of the people and giving the private sector a red carpet to take care of public services for the people. The Islamic law products are harassed and are more comfortable with homemade (**secular man-made**) laws. The economic system is based on usury. And the social system is completely imitating Western civilization which is filled with the notion of freedom of lust.

Whereas the principles of Islamic political economy explained by Shaykh Taqiyuddin an Nabhani emphasize the vital role of the state in meeting the basic needs of the people head by head or person by person. They are not assessed on an accumulation basis like the capitalist economic theory. This principle has a tremendous sociological impact. The basic needs of the people are the first key to a healthy civilization, a determinant of human development, which will unlock the quality of generations of civilization in a sustainable manner.

When basic needs are deprived, they will continue to be inward looking and individualistic, unable to pay attention to great major problems of their country, and always in crisis mode at low levels. On the other hand, when basic needs are met, humans can grow and develop and then unlock a lot of their intellectual potential and attention to strategic major problems. They will be transformed into outstanding human beings with the contribution of civilization work so that the civilization of society continues to run in nobility and glory.

They will transform into the best generation of humankind who lives a good life because of their obedience to their Lord. There will be a reward for those who believe and do good deeds, namely a life in which a sense of happiness is filled so that a tranquil and spacious in living life, without a tight chest and a crushing burden.

﴿مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾

“Whoever does good, whether male or female, and is a believer, We will surely bless them with a good life, and We will certainly reward them according to the best of their deeds.” [TMQ. an-Naḥl [16]: 97]

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