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Hartati turns on the waterworks, claims innocence and ignorance

[A-](#) [A](#) [A+](#)

Paper Edition | Page: 4

Politically wired businesswoman, Hartati Murdaya, delivered an emotional defense statement at the Jakarta Corruption Court on Monday, insisting that she was not to blame for a bribery scandal that involved her and her company.

Hartati maintained that it was her subordinates who paid the bribe to the regent of Buol in Central Sulawesi, Amran Batalipu.

"I never intended to make any donation to Amran. The bribe was given entirely on Totok Lestiyo's [her subordinate] own initiative. The money was given without my consent," said Hartati, holding back her tears. She was later seen to be sobbing.

Hartati then pleaded to the panel of judges to drop all the charges against her and promised that she would use her freedom to do more charity work.

"My vision is to defend the rights of my employees and many other people whose lives depend on me," the 68-year-old chair of the Indonesian Buddhist Council (Walubi) said.

Hartati claims the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) case against her had put a halt to her efforts to help eradicating poverty in disadvantaged regions.

She said that her business enterprise in Buol was part of her effort to develop the area.

Hartati then lambasted the prosecution case against her, saying that there were other businesspersons worse than she who should be brought to court.

"If Hartati, who is known to be clean, is implicated and in prison, then how about other businesspersons?" she said.

Hartati is a former member of Democratic Party's board of patrons and is accused of paying Rp 3 billion (US\$312,000) in bribes to Amran to expedite a permit she needed for her oil palm plantation company, PT Hartati Inti Plantation (HIP).

The KPK prosecutors have charged her under Article 5 of the Corruption Law on bribery and demanded the maximum of five years imprisonment and a fine of Rp 250 million.

The KPK has named three other suspects in the case; Amran and two of Hartati's aides, Gondo Sudjono and Yani Ansori.

Prosecutors are seeking a 12-year jail term for Amran.

Gondo, a general manager at HIP and Yani Ansori, an operational director for the company, allegedly visited Amran's house in Buol and hand over Rp 1 billion — the first payment of the promised Rp 3 billion — under Hartati's instruction.

Gondo and Yani have already been sentenced to two and a half years and ordered to pay Rp 50 million in fines.

In her statement, Hartati insisted that the director of HIP, Totok, gave the order to Gondo and Yani to pay the bribe.

KPK prosecutors said they are firm with their charges.

"We will not make any response to the plea," leading prosecutor Yudi Kristiana said.

During this Monday's session of the trial, Hartati's lawyer Tumbur Simanjuntak called on the judges to move Hartati from the KPK detention center to the maximum security facility in Guntur, South Jakarta.

"Because of the recent flooding, we want the judges to consider relocating our client permanently to Guntur," he said.

Another lawyer Denny Kailimang said Hartati was traumatized by the flood because she was nearly electrocuted when water flooded her cell in the basement of the KPK headquarters in South Jakarta.

Presiding judge Gusrizal said that only the KPK had the authority to decide where Hartati would be kept.

KPK spokesperson Johan Budi said that Hartati would probably spend one week at Guntur, pending repair work at the KPK offices.

During a court session in December last year, Hartati asked the court to allow food deliveries as the prison food was not up to her usual standards.

Hartati said she hardly ate any food provided due to her illnesses and her being a vegetarian.

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