

Indonesian Journalists in Bandung Prepare to Cover Avian Flu as New Outbreak Hits West Java

Reporters at an Internews workshop are faced with a breaking story as a suspected avian flu victim dies hours after her treatment was announced at the training session.

“Please excuse us, we’ve got to rush to the hospital. The 10-year-old kid suspected of carrying the H5N1 avian flu virus just died in the intensive care unit,” reporters Fatimah and Wilda Nurlianti told the other journalists participating in an Internews avian flu training program in Bandung this week.

“But we’ll rush back after our interviews. We still need tips on how to write our stories,” they added, turning to Internews trainers Sonny Inbaraj and Ester Hutabarat.

Health reporters Fatimah from *Tribun Jabar* and *Pikiran Rakyat*’s Wilda were under pressure from their editors to put their newly acquired skills on avian flu reporting into real-time action.

“I’ll stay back here at the training. When you’re back, we’ll share notes and my cameraman and I will zoom to the hospital when the training ends,” SCTV’s Feri Walysuri was heard whispering to reporter Wilda. They were networking with one another in the coverage of an important story without fear of competition

ANNOUNCEMENT SPURS JOURNALISTS TO TRACK DOWN FACTS

On the second and last day of the UNICEF sponsored workshop, a scheduled speaker, Dr. Hadi Yusuf, head of the avian flu team from the local Hasan Sadikin Hospital, told the journalists that he had been at the hospital the night before treating two suspected cases of avian flu.

“I apologize ... my presentation might

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Internews trainees Fatimah and Wilda Nurlianti, at left, interview Dr. Hadi Yusuf, far right, head of the avian flu team at Hasan Sadikin Hospital, Bandung.

seem a bit short this morning. I actually wanted to put in more slides in my Powerpoint presentation, but I spent the whole night in the intensive care unit treating the two suspected cases of bird flu,” he told the journalists.

The two patients, a 10-year-old girl and an 18-year-old man, were admitted to Hasan Sadikin Hospital in Bandung on the evening of May 22. The siblings, residents of Cileunyi in Bandung regency, in West Java, exhibited symptoms associated with avian flu and had known contact with dead chickens. The first avian flu cluster in West Java was identified earlier this year in Indramayu, where several members of the same family died.

Among the topics Dr. Hadi spoke on was how to prevent avian flu in humans

and local preventative measures in Bandung.

WORKSHOP SKILLS PUT TO USE ON BREAKING STORY

During the coffee break immediately after Dr. Hadi’s presentation, the journalists started interviewing the infectious disease specialist. During their lunch break they rushed to the Hasan Sadikin Hospital in the city to gather further facts and background information.

“This training by Internews has been really useful for me. Even though I’m a health reporter, I’m quite concerned about getting my facts right and being accurate,” *Tribun Jabar*’s Fatimah later told trainer Inbaraj. “I’m glad that during the training we talked about the ethical issues involved

in reporting bird flu cases, especially when we're reporting on children," she added.

Discussions in the workshops focused on avoiding sensationalist headlines, safety issues for journalists when covering avian flu, responsibility in reporting on avian flu and the ethical concerns when covering children.

WORKSHOP TOPICS PROVE TIMELY AS REPORTERS LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE

The workshop that was wrapping up as this story broke focused on preparing journalists to think beyond an individual case and examine the larger issues surrounding avian flu.

The 10-year-old girl's condition deteriorated and she died at 2:50 PM on May 23. Her 18-year-old brother died about five hours later the same day.

The resulting coverage of the case in Bandung highlighted the importance of informed reporting and the positive impact of interventions such as these workshops.

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Internews trainee Asep Furqon (right) of GIGA FM, together with trainer Sonny Inbaraj (center), interview a chicken seller at the Sukahaji bird market in Bandung, West Java. Reporters attending the Internews workshop co-operated in covering the breaking news story.

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Trainee Fatimah from *Tribun Jabar*

ADDITIONAL WORKSHOPS PLANNED ACROSS INDONESIA

The Bandung workshop is the second in a series of Internews workshops for journalists across Indonesia being held with support from UNICEF. Over nine weeks from May to June, Internews will hold a series of workshops in Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Semarang, Makassar and Medan culminating with a roundtable discussion with editors in Jakarta in July.

While the government put the total cases of avian flu in Indonesia at 43, with 33 fatalities, the World Health Organization put the figure at 41 cases, with 32 fatalities.

According to a reporter with the *Sinar Harapan* daily who attended the first workshop in Jakarta, "We have a moral and social responsibility through our media to save lives ... Yes, avian flu is scary, but we can make a difference. People can learn how to protect themselves."

The workshops will provide journalists with the skills to report accurately and effectively as well as a thorough understanding of avian flu and its potential threats.

To read some of the reports in Bahasa

Indonesia from the Internews trainees in Bandung follow the links below:

<http://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/cetak/2006/052006/24/0207.htm>

<http://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/cetak/2006/052006/24/0206.htm>

<http://www.indonesia.com/tribunjabar/detail.asp?id=1098>

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