

Cinta Laura Kiehl: Proving her love for the country

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Theresa Sufa, The Jakarta Post, Bogor, West Java

Eurasian teen soap opera star Cinta Laura Kiehl might not speak Indonesian as fluently as other youngsters in the country, but she believes that love for one's country should not be measured by fluency in the language or the ability to sing the national anthem well.

She believes it is demonstrated through attitude and genuine efforts to help others.

Cinta, who was born in Germany on Aug. 17, 1993, and whose name means love, says she has a love for Indonesia and is proud to be an Indonesian.

I am proud to have dual citizenship; Indonesian and German. I admire Indonesia because it is very beautiful and rich with unique and various cultures. I am also proud of Germany with its advanced technology, said Cinta, who prefers to call herself an international citizen.

Cinta's star is shining brightly, especially after her debut in the TV soap Cinderella.

She started building her career in TV in 2006 when her dance teacher suggested she join an acting and modeling contest in Jakarta.

Beyond her expectations, she won first place.

It just so happened that one of the contest jury members was Sanjay Mulani, the casting director of MD Entertainment, one of the biggest production houses in the country.

He offered Cinta the lead role in the 308-episode Cinderella TV soap, which is broadcasted by SCTV.

MD Entertainment gave Cinta four months to improve her Indonesian language skills and learn to act.

In January 2007, filming for Cinderella began and the first episode was broadcast on TV the following month.

Cinderella proved to be a big success. It was rated one of the top 10 soaps and won an SCTV award in the best soap opera category. Cinta was also named best actress and was the first newcomer to be nominated for most popular actress in the Panasonic Awards. She was named the most shining artist for 2007.

Cinta did not grow up in Indonesia and her parents often moved the family from one country to another, hence the reason her Indonesian is not fluent.

Her father, Michael Kiehl, was a general manager of the Hyatt Hotel chain and worked not only in Jakarta, but also Germany, Dubai, China and Malaysia. In 2000 the family decided to settle in Indonesia; more precisely, Bogor.

Cinta discusses everyday matters in Indonesian with her Indonesian mother, Herdiana. But when it comes to her school lessons, for example, she finds it difficult to express her ideas in Indonesian, according to her mother.

A popular star, Cinta has appeared on TV gossip shows and interviews in which she spoke in mixed Indonesian and English, which resulted in some unfavorable public comments.

But what really disappointed Cinta and her family was when an Internet website claimed she was planning to learn Indonesian language in Australia.

That's strange. If we want to study Indonesian, we should do it in our own country; Indonesia, Herdiana said, adding the website was created one month after shooting for Cinderella began.

Yet, it seems the language issue has not hampered Cinta's career and her contribution to the education of many needy children.

The 14-year-old starlet cares a great deal about education and from a very young age has been involved in various social education activities. Her mother is the chairwoman of Soekarseno Foundation of Care for Education, which has helped renovate many school buildings in remote villages of Bogor Regency.

Nine elementary schools and two junior high schools, many located at the foot of Mount Salak, have been renovated and built by the foundation.

Cinta even sets aside a percentage of her income to pay the wages of 60 contract teachers and operational costs of the schools.

When Cinta was younger, her mother would often take her along to visit the schools so she could see with her own eyes the life of rural children and feel what they experienced and what they needed.

Cinta is thankful to her parents for teaching her to care about others and regards their teachings as blessings in her life.

She began helping fellow students learn English from the sixth grade. After completing the ninth grade and moving to the Jakarta International School (JIS) -- and after beginning her busy soap opera schedule -- Cinta now only has time to teach English once a month.

However, when she has time off from shooting, Cinta makes the effort to meet elementary school students and play basketball with them or talk to them about their school lessons.

Although her Indonesian is not that fluent, children living at the foot of Mount Salak miss her and enthusiastically listen to every single word that comes out of her mouth.

According to Cinta, genuine efforts to help people shows that one really loves their country.

For me, education is very important and what I have done to help my friends in the elementary schools supported by Soekarseno Foundation is not much. I hope they can all continue their education as high as possible because education is very important to break the poverty chain.

As for me, even though I am on location shooting, I keep studying ... if there is any homework, I always try to do my best. I don't want to abandon my education, I want everything to run well, said Cinta, who hopes to one day become a humanitarian ambassador like Bono or Angelina Jolie.

The artist, who lives by the 3B (Beauty, Brains, Behavior) motto, and is a big fan of Sandra Bullock, plans to study at Harvard University, in the U.S., after she graduates from JIS.

But for now she is busy shooting scenes for her debut big-screen appearance in Oh Baby, which will be shown in cinemas in April, 2008.

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