



Delhi Policy Group

# DPG SPECIAL BRIEF: AMBASSADORS' DIARIES

Commemorating the 70th Anniversary of  
Diplomatic Relations between India and Indonesia

## *Authors*

*Sidharto R. Suryodipuro  
Hemant Krishan Singh*

Volume IV, Issue 10

MAY 28, 2019



Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)





**DPG SPECIAL BRIEF:  
AMBASSADORS' DIARIES**  
**Commemorating the 70th Anniversary of Diplomatic  
Relations between India and Indonesia  
May 28, 2019**

## **ABOUT US**

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group is among India's oldest independent think tanks with its primary focus on international and strategic issues of critical national interest. Over the past decades, the Delhi Policy Group has established itself in both domestic and international circles, particularly in the area of national security.

In keeping with India's increasing global profile as a leading power and the accompanying dynamism of India's foreign and security policy, the Delhi Policy Group has expanded its focus areas to include India's broader regional and global role; India's initiatives to strengthen its strategic periphery; India's political, security and connectivity challenges and policies across the Indo-Pacific; and the strategic partnerships that advance India's rise. To support these goals, the DPG undertakes research, publishes policy reports and organises conferences on strategic and geo-political, geo-economic, and defence and security issues.

## **Authors**

H.E. Sidharto R. Suryodipuro, Ambassador of Indonesia to India and Bhutan  
Ambassador Hemant Krishan Singh, Director General, Delhi Policy Group

*The views expressed in this piece are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Delhi Policy Group as an Institution.*

## **Cover Photographs:**

*(Photographs top to bottom)*

*Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joko Widodo addressing the press following their summit meeting in Jakarta on May 30, 2018. Source: PIB*

*The inaugural edition of the India-Indonesia Bilateral Naval Exercise 'Samudra Shakti' was held at Surabaya, Indonesia from November 12-18, 2018. Source: Indian Navy*

© 2019 by the Delhi Policy Group

**Delhi Policy Group**  
Core 5A, 1st Floor,  
India Habitat Centre,  
Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003.  
[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)





**DPG SPECIAL BRIEF:  
AMBASSADORS' DIARIES**  
**Commemorating the 70th Anniversary of Diplomatic  
Relations between India and Indonesia  
May 28, 2019**

## **Contents**

**India-Indonesia Ties 2019 to 2050: From a Glorious Past to a Bright Future**  
*H.E. Sidharto R. Suryodipuro, Ambassador of Indonesia to India and Bhutan .. 1*

**India and Indonesia: A Timeless Partnership**  
*Hemant Krishan Singh, Ambassador of India to Indonesia (2003-2006) ..... 13*



## India-Indonesia Ties 2019 to 2050: From a Glorious Past to a Bright Future

Ambassador Sidharto R. Suryodipuro\*

To sum up one's experiences and understanding of one of the longest relationships in history between two countries in an article is not as simple. Yet, it feels as easy to talk about India as it does of a cousin born out of colonial vestiges and bred by fathers who were bonded by the spirit of brotherhood and a common vision for Asia. Today, seventy years after India and Indonesia formally sealed diplomatic ties, there is so much we can cherish and even more that we can build upon for a prosperous future.



*Indian Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, President of Egypt Gamal Abdel Nasser, Indonesian President Sukarno and President of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito in the Asian-African Conference held at Bandung in 1955. Source: Research Gate*

The relationship between India and Indonesia goes back thousands of years into history, to the times of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, when kingdoms were bound by civilizational and cultural ties. The more modern name, Indonesia, is derived from the Greek words, 'Indo' meaning India and 'nesos' meaning island. The closeness of Indonesia to India begins with the

---

\* Ambassador Sidharto R. Suryodipuro is the current Ambassador of Indonesia to India and Bhutan.



christening of the country itself, much before both were politically independent.



*A traditional Kamasan painting from Bali showing a scene from the Ramayana.*

*Source: Kalarte*

In 1949, four years after fighting a bitter war of independence against the Netherlands, the Dutch officially transferred sovereignty to Indonesia. In December the same year, India granted formal recognition to the Republic of Indonesia. Indonesia, on its part, had already declared itself independent on August 17, 1945. It, therefore, had already extended diplomatic recognition to India at its very birth as a modern nation state on August 15, 1947. A new chapter began in the relationship between two of Asia's largest countries.

### *My Experience in India:*

On July 15, 2017, I arrived in India's capital at the height of the Delhi summer. The heat of the scorching sun was immediately soothed by the warmth of people around, the vibrancy of the city and the sense of proximity to my own land, especially because my role as Ambassador to India came immediately



after my tenure as Deputy Chief of Mission in Washington DC. On reaching my new residence at Chanakyapuri, I felt very much at home in India.



*Indonesian President Sukarno and First Lady Fatmawati were the Chief Guests when India became a Republic on January 26, 1950. Source: Indonesian Government Archives*

Further reassurance was the information that Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru himself had chosen the location of the Indonesian Embassy close to his then residence at the Teen Murti Complex, that today stands as the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. Nehru's relationship with the first President of Indonesia, Sukarno, is a well-documented one. Sukarno was invited as the chief guest to celebrate India's first Republic Day on January 26, 1950. Thereafter, Nehru and Sukarno, both men of vision and ambition, went on to shape Asian politics in the post-World War II era. The seeds of a new world order were sown at the Bandung Conference in 1955 that brought together Asian and African countries which had emerged out of a de-colonizing wave. The establishment of the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) in 1961 further bonded the ties between India and Indonesia, something that remains etched in international history and has indeed become a permanent fixture of international politics.



*President Sukarno and Prime Minister Nehru at the historic Bandung Conference in 1955. Source: Indonesian Government Archives*

Yet, my sense of neighbourliness transcends beyond residential abodes and political fathers. India and Indonesia are geographical and maritime neighbors. That the southern-most tip of India at Indira Point, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, is only about 90 nautical miles from Sabang Island in the Aceh Province of Sumatra is often lost on people. India and Indonesia sit at the centre of Bay of Bengal and are crucial players in the Malacca Strait through which 25% of the world's global trade takes place. The security and prosperity of many countries lies here. This fact is acknowledged much more in contemporary times. The increased frequency of visits exchanged by the leaderships of both countries in recent years is testimony to the growing importance of India and Indonesia in the foreign policies of each other.

In fact, notwithstanding President Joko Widodo's visit to India in December 2016, my experience in Delhi has been marked by many important visits and exchanges of ideas and businesses. In January 2018, President Joko Widodo, along with the heads of other ASEAN states, came to New Delhi to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> year of the India-ASEAN Dialogue Relations, as well to take part in India's 69<sup>th</sup> Republic day celebration as chief guests. Besides attending the India-ASEAN Commemorative summit, President Widodo also conducted a bilateral meeting with PM Modi. Four months later, in May 2018, PM Modi visited Indonesia. The Jakarta visit was highlighted by the signing of a historic document titled "Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific", that has since then become the framework on which the maritime relationship of both countries is being built.





*The President of Indonesia Joko Widodo paid a State visit to India from December 11-13, 2016. Here he is shown being welcomed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.*

*Source: PMO*

The heat of the Doklam standoff between India and China, during my very early weeks in Delhi in 2017, dawned upon me the importance of stability in the South and Southeast Asian region in the larger interest of the Indo-Pacific. Indonesia and Southeast Asia, that scholars like Amitav Acharya describe as the 'East of India, South of China', have a lot at stake when it comes to a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific. So do non-resident partners like the USA and Russia.

As the world focus shifts from the Trans-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific, India's association with multilateral forums in the region indirectly affects its relationship with Indonesia as well. In this context, India's engagement with the ASEAN as well as the East Asian Summit has led to a convergence of vision for the region between India and Indonesia, something that in the previous decades was either divergent or absent altogether. With India's progression of ties with ASEAN, the year 2017 marked the 25<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sectoral partnership, Summit level Partnership and Strategic Partnership respectively of the India-ASEAN relations.



*Indonesian President Joko Widodo joined leaders from other ASEAN countries and India to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of India-ASEAN Dialogue relations on January 25, 2018. Source: Zee News*

The sense of historical and cultural connectedness between India and Indonesia is inescapable while in New Delhi. An Indonesian in India finds immense resemblance to their own homeland, in the names of many people like Ram, Arjun, Sita, Aditya as well as places like Kurukshetra, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Bharat (meaning west in Indonesia), etc. Similarly, my Indian friends and colleagues find it remarkable that the Indonesian Ambassador to India and his wife are named Sidharto and Dewi Ratna, words which have a very deep resonance in the Indian psyche. They are even more fascinated when they learn that with names such as ours, we are indeed Muslims!

History and culture aside, few other dimensions about both countries are worth mentioning. India is Indonesia's largest neighbor while Indonesia is India's second largest neighbor, after China. In terms of expanse, with 3.2 million sq. km and 1.9 million sq. km of land respectively, India and Indonesia are the third and eight largest countries in Asia. In terms of population, India has about 1.3 billion people while Indonesia has a population of 265 million, making them the world's second and fourth most populous states respectively.



*Built in the 10th century, the Prambanan Temple is the largest temple complex dedicated to Lord Shiva in Indonesia. It presents the grandiose tradition of Shaivik art as a masterpiece of the classical period in Indonesia. Source: Wikipedia/ Gunawan Kartapranata*

On the economic front, Indonesia is India's fourth largest trading partner. Bilateral trade stands at \$21 billion, half of which comprises of coal and palm oil exports to India. Interestingly, among my first challenging tasks in India was the urgent need to understand the issues behind a rapid rise of import duties against palm oil from Indonesia. It was upon me to ensure that Indonesian palm oil gets a fair treatment compared with other vegetable oils in the Indian market. As the markets of both India and Indonesia are expanding in size, so has the scope for ample growth of trade in the future.

### *Looking into the future:*

The future of India-Indonesia relations is bright and filled with opportunities. The role both countries have played in the region has become more significant over time. Soon, this bilateral relationship will shape the Indo-Pacific region and the world.



The 'World in 2050' Report of Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) predicts that by 2050, India will be the second largest economy with a GDP of \$42 trillion, just behind China, while Indonesia, with an economy worth \$12 trillion, will be the fourth largest, behind the USA. It is in this sense that both India and Indonesia must strive to go beyond a traditional paradigm and think outside the box, with vision and ambition matching that of their forefathers of the 1940s and 1950s. Indian and Indonesian leaders are indeed standing up to the challenge.

A case in point is that of palm oil trade. India is the largest consumer of palm oil and Indonesia the largest producer, and yet, more than 90% of patents of palm oil products are held by western multinational companies. Though Indonesia's vision is to ensure that its palm oil continues to best service the Indian vegetable oil market, there is an obvious need for discussion and joint research by our scientists and experts to deliver the best product suited for our demands. Much more needs to be invested in nurturing economic ties. While traditional commodities shall remain crucial in the foreseeable future, a more creative outlook is required to bring in various tradable items into the list, so that the size and potential of economic exchange between the two countries are best reflected. On that note, we in Indonesia are happy that our import of India's bovine meat, for example, has helped bring down the price of meat in the Indonesian market. Similarly, in the past year India exported a growing number of items like turbines, chemical products, rice and transport vehicles to Indonesia while it imported steel, chemical products, electrical appliances and tugboats from Indonesia.

It was timely that in 2018, during PM Modi's Indonesia visit, both countries envisioned to increase their bilateral trade to \$50 billion by 2025 and agreed to strengthen cooperation in all areas by establishing a new 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'. While signing a Defense Agreement at the time, both countries agreed to hold regular bilateral dialogues as well as to consult each other on issues of common strategic and military interest, besides also conducting military education and training exercises. India and Indonesia have been engaged in carrying out coordinated patrols in the Indian Ocean since 2002. In fact, in March this year, I attended the 32<sup>nd</sup> India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) which highlighted the continued collaboration of the two navies in the Indo-Pacific.





*The inaugural edition of the India-Indonesia Bilateral Naval Exercise 'Samudra Shakti' was held at Surabaya, Indonesia from November 12-18, 2018. Source: Indian Navy*

I believe that the idea of compartmentalized regions such as South Asia or Southeast Asia is becoming obsolete in the course of shifting geopolitics and geo-economics. A rising Indo-Pacific is a case in point, as is the case with the growing importance of the Bay of Bengal. India and Indonesia must work towards enhancing their maritime networks and connectivity linkages in this light. In fact, an MoU signed between the Andaman Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) and the Aceh Chamber of Commerce is enabling movement of goods between the two countries today. In January this year, a boat from Banda Aceh carrying goods for exhibition was welcomed in Port Blair. This has become a driver for such inter-country business to take place in the area.

Acknowledging the need for the relationship to be grounded on pragmatic concerns, India and Indonesia must aim to take their relationship sky-high. In fact, going beyond military and maritime collaborations, aerospace cooperation between the two countries is a case in point. Last year, India's ISRO and Indonesia's LAPAN (Indonesia Lembaga Penerbangan dan Antariksa Nasional) signed a Framework Agreement for exploring the use of outer space, albeit for peaceful purposes. In February 2019, the Indian Cabinet approved this agreement, further strengthening the strong ties both share in this regard. It is no surprise that ISRO launched two Indonesian satellites earlier in 2015 and 2016 respectively.

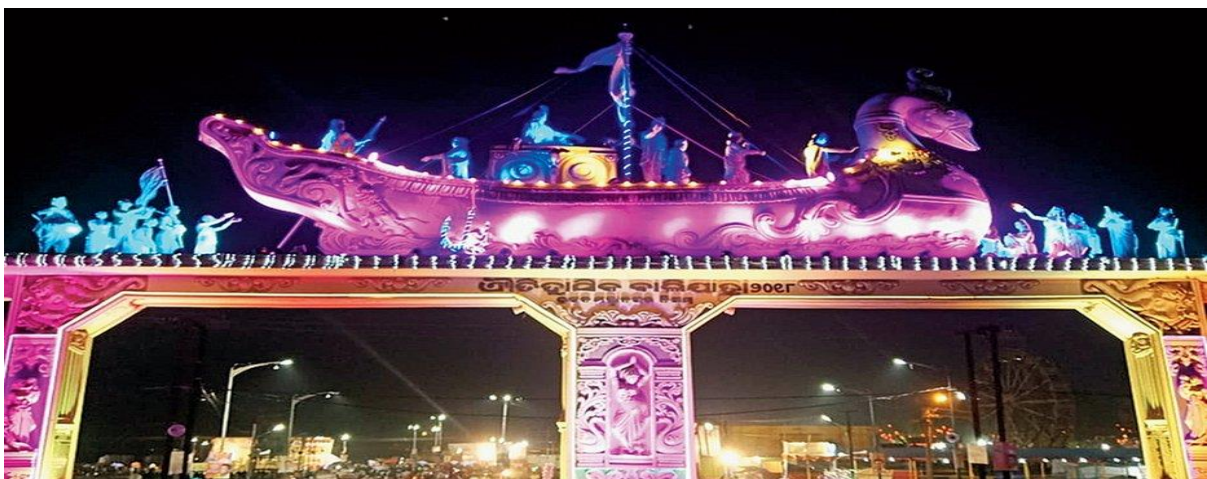


*In order to meet its continuous Telemetry requirements, ISRO established a downrange station at Biak (Indonesia) in 1998. As the Biak station has some exclusive locational advantages that are not visible to Indian stations, it is optimally utilised to support ISRO's satellite operations as well. Source: ISRO*

Presently, both countries are very large importers of civilian aircraft, despite having indigenous capabilities to develop them on their own. Such aircraft are very much required to connect the far-flung corners of the respective countries and it will be fruitful to consider jointly developing and marketing civilian aircraft for the Indian and Indonesian markets. Additionally, since Port Blair is connected by air and sea to mainland India, from Kolkata and Chennai, it could be immensely beneficial to establish a transit point in Port Blair for the onward journey to Sabang in Indonesia. There are already some talks of infrastructure investment by Indian companies in Sabang. Though currently there is no specific investment proposal that can catch the attention of private companies to invest into the area, it becomes my work to encourage Indian companies to understand the opportunities, learn about the market in Indonesia and enable them to make educated decisions. As recently as in March this year, a delegation of over 30 CEOs participated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> India-Indonesia Infrastructure Forum (IIIF) held in Jakarta. Initiatives such as IIIF have indeed helped harness the growing synergies between these two emerging economies in Asia.

At a more micro level, individuals in Indonesia relate to the civilizational heritage they share with India. However, there is a gap amongst Indonesians in understanding India beyond the glitz of Bollywood and the tales of Mahabharata. One way to improve this situation is by highlighting sectors such as education, tourism and business in India. At present, there are fewer than 150 Indonesian students across India. Higher education in India provides a good platform for students to learn and then network on the world stage, from Silicon Valley to multinational corporations and multilateral banking institutions and to the medical and pharmaceutical companies across the globe. The scope that is laid out not only by higher education but also business in India needs to be better tapped by Indonesians. The number of Indian visitors has dramatically increased from 485,000 in 2017 to 600,000 in 2018. Indians find Indonesia an attractive destination to visit as compared to many other Asian countries.

While in Jakarta last May, PM Modi reminded us of the civilizational heritage and historical linkages between our two countries, particularly between Kalinga and Bali. This special connect between the two places is celebrated in form of the Bali Yatra festival every year in Cuttack, Odisha. As part of revival of the Bali Yatra tradition, in 2018, our Embassy at Delhi presented a multi-media initiative called "The pride and glory of Bali-yatra". Along with "Resource Indica: Roots & Revelation", it held editions in New Delhi, Kolkata as well as in Bhubaneswar. On a similar note, this year, a crafts and skills exchange workshop was held in Dilli Haat, where the 'Dastkari Haat Saamiti' managed to bring together craftspeople of both countries in creating vibrant handmade products. Such cultural and interactive activities have helped enhance the relationship between people as well as governments of both the countries.



*Entrance to the Bali Yatra in Cuttack. Commemorative of the ancient maritime glory of Odisha, when merchants from Odisha set sail for the South-east Asian region for trade and commerce, the historic Bali Yatra fair is held in Cuttack every year in November. Source: The Telegraph*



India and Indonesia are committed to build and invest further in their blossoming relationship. As the Ambassador, I am inclined to improve Indonesia's capacity in India in order to better reach out to all elements of society as well as governments at the Union and State levels. Besides the Indonesian Embassy in New Delhi, only one Indonesian Consulate finds its presence in Mumbai today, in addition to our Honorary Consuls in Chennai and Kolkata. To remedy this under capacity, we can convert the trade office in Chennai into a functioning Consulate General, besides considering establishment of other business and diplomatic presence in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Port Blair, among others. In the near future, the need for more diplomats posted in each other's country will be an important requirement. Scholars and academicians should be encouraged to take up increased research in understanding the issues and requirements in their neighboring countries, while policy makers should take a holistic perspective on the India-Indonesia relationship for any future deliberation.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is said to be the Asian Century. India and Indonesia are sure to play big roles in the making of it. Both are large countries that embody the values of democracy, pluralism and tolerance. Their belief in non-alignment has molded their views on denouncing military alliances and standing up for the rule of law in contemporary times. If they are to boost their relationship and fulfill their trade vision of 2025 and reach the heights envisioned for them in 2050, both countries need to further invest in their foreign policy vis-à-vis each other. As countries with common values ingrained in their spirit, India and Indonesia hold the key to a prosperous Asia. Therefore, as the two countries erase the few blind spots of yesterday, they must also double down in realizing their full potential and stride ahead in fulfilling the common vision of the future.

## India and Indonesia: A Timeless Partnership

Ambassador Hemant Krishan Singh\*

Retrospectives pose an interesting challenge, not least when you seek to capture over two millennia of shared history through the prism of a three-year tenure in Jakarta.

Arriving in the early morning after a rainstorm had washed Cengkareng, I found myself in a ceremonial lounge adorned by scenes from the ancient Indian epics, a vivid reminder that I was in *Yuvadwipa* (Java) of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Outside the lounge, modern-day flying birds of *Garuda* completed the picture. From the legends of *Swarnabhumi* (Sumatra) to the sacred chanting of prayers in *Pura Besakih* (Bali), I could never be an outsider in this great nation where people, rivers and mountains bore ancient Sanskrit names derived from my own homeland.



*A traditional Kamasan painting of Garuda, the vahana of Lord Vishnu, which features on the national emblem of Indonesia. Source: Raressensuals*

---

\* Ambassador Hemant Krishan Singh is the Director General of the Delhi Policy Group. He was the Ambassador of India to Indonesia from February 2003 - May 2006.

Perhaps there is no other country with which India shares so much in common – geographical expanse, diversity, religions, languages, cultural and social mores and civilisational ties – as Indonesia. As both countries embarked on their modern journeys as free nations, Nehru invited Sukarno for India's first Republic Day celebrations held on January 26, 1950. The founder of modern Indonesia remarked on that occasion that "the whole world realizes the deep significance of the independence of India, but I think there is no country which realizes its significance more than Indonesia does." He ended his speech with the salutation "Jai Hind". Unsurprisingly, the concluding chapter of colonialism was crafted by Nehru and Sukarno and the advent of a new world order was heralded by them jointly at Bandung in 1955. When President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono hosted leaders of the emerging world 50 years later, he invited the Indian Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, to speak on behalf of Asia. The two strode together ahead of other world leaders in a ceremonial walk to the historic Bandung venue, Gedung Asia-Africa.



*Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Chinese President Hu Jintao leading a ceremonial walk to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Bandung Conference in West Java in 2005.*

*Source: China Daily*

As new nations born in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the trajectories of India and Indonesia did not always coincide. Unlike in India, Indonesia's independence was secured by a combination of forces, from secular



nationalists to proponents of an Islamic State, from the military to Communists. A post-independence power struggle among them resulted in an unstable polity for several decades, even as India found its anchor in liberal democracy. There were other distortions along the way as well, including disastrous military adventures chasing a "Nusantara" dream and pogroms that effectively de-politicised Indonesian society. Eventually, a financial and economic crisis triggered the spectacular political collapse of the Suharto regime in May, 1998. Loss of East Timor in 1999 was a further blow to Indonesia's national morale. The reform era began, and it was the most intense phase of institutionalizing democratic governance which unfolded before me during my eventful tenure.



*Ceremonial Reception of Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, on November 21, 2005. Source: Indonesian Government Archives*

Within a short time-span at the start of this new century, Indonesia joined India as a pluralistic democracy. Dr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, popularly known as SBY, became the first President of Indonesia to be directly elected by the people and to assume office in a peaceful and democratic transfer of power in October, 2004. Public expectations from SBY were impossibly high. In a

democratic polity, the Presidency was no longer all-powerful and had to contend with an assertive Parliament and multiple political parties. SBY met the challenge resolutely. By refusing to rebuild an authoritarian power base and allowing the process of decentralization and dispersal of power at both the central and provincial levels to proceed apace, he sustained Indonesia's democratic evolution. As he pursued difficult economic reforms, ended the TNI's role in national political affairs and empowered institutions like the anti-corruption watchdog KPK, he proved adept at continuously engaging the public to sustain optimism about the new democratic path. In the midst of the unprecedented tragedy of the December 2004 Asian Tsunami, SBY found the opportunity to resolve the long-festering problem of insurgency in Aceh. He also reaffirmed Indonesia's constitutional commitment to an open society by bringing to justice the Jemaah Islamiyah perpetrators of the horrific 2002 Bali terrorist bomb blasts and others that followed, greatly enhancing Indonesia's internal stability and security.

Standing on the shores of the Malacca straits at Belawan near Medan in early 2003, not far from where Netaji had raised the banner of India's freedom in 1942, I witnessed the launch of the second joint coordinated patrol conducted by the Indian and Indonesian navies. Not many in India realize that the western tip of Indonesia is just 90 nautical miles away from India's geographical footprint in Southeast Asia, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. A new era of maritime security cooperation was dawning, culminating in the visit of the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet led by aircraft carrier INS Viraat to Jakarta in July, 2005. Not coincidentally, two Indian Navy ships were among the first to bring relief to victims of the Aceh Tsunami of December, 2004. An even more effective HA/DR operation was undertaken by the Indian Navy following the Yogyakarta earthquake of May, 2006.

The first bilateral naval exercise between the Indian and Indonesian Navies, "Samudra Shakti", was inaugurated at Surabaya, Indonesia on November 13, 2018 giving further momentum to the strategic partnership. The commencement of this naval exercise marks a significant forward step in the operational engagement between the two navies, building on the IND-INDO CORPAT exercises which have been ongoing since 2002. It is my hope that sometime in the near future, India and Indonesia will undertake multi-service joint exercises, thereby contributing to greater regional security in the waters that connect the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Since 2000, every President of Indonesia and every Indian Prime Minister has visited the other country at least once during their time in office. These visits have cemented the strategic partnership between our maritime democracies.

It should not, therefore, come as a surprise that the thinking of these two Asian democracies regarding the Indo-Pacific maritime, from President Jokowi's Global Maritime Fulcrum to Prime Minister Modi's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All), largely coincides. To highlight the importance of the Indo-Pacific, both countries have recently upgraded bilateral ties to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership". They have also adopted a "Shared Vision on Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific" which will enable them to contribute to regional stability and prosperity.



*Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joko Widodo at their summit meeting in Istana Merdeka in Jakarta on May 30, 2018. Source: PIB*

These significant advances have befittingly come ahead of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Indonesia in August, 2019. Free and fair elections held in both republics in May, 2019 have once again reaffirmed their close bonds as Asia's largest pluralist democracies upholding individual rights, economic liberty and the societal freedoms of worship and association.

Relations with ASEAN are at the heart of India's "Look East" policy and Indonesia is central to ASEAN. Even as it revived its role in shaping an ASEAN Community, Indonesia ensured India's participation in the inaugural East Asia Summit held in December, 2005. Since then, India and Indonesia have worked closely to develop an open and inclusive regional architecture that promotes economic integration and security.





*Business leaders of the India-Indonesia CEO Forum presenting their report to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joko Widodo in Jakarta on May 30, 2018.*

*Source: PIB*

The small but stellar Indian community in Indonesia is prosperous, well integrated and widely respected, perhaps more so than in any other regional country. From Bollywood blockbusters to music and dance, Indian culture is in great demand among a kindred people. The Indonesian Government announced a visa on arrival policy for Indian nationals in 2005. India also opened a second Cultural Centre in Bali in the same year. Hopefully, someday the two countries will undertake a joint project to document the cultural, religious, linguistic and civilisational exchanges between them over the past 2500 years, from Srivijaya to Majapahit, patola to ikat textiles, sarees to sarongs, and ayurveda to jamu.

Off the beaten track of diplomacy memories abound, too many to be enumerated. The pre-dawn call to prayers at the Sunda Kelapa mosque wafting across Taman Suropati in Menteng; early morning mist in the mountains above Bogor; fruit sellers hunched languidly beside the 12<sup>th</sup> hole at the picturesque Rancamaya; waves of the Indian Ocean crashing onto the rocks below the Tanah Lot Temple in Bali; Borobodur and Prambanan rising majestically above the Yogyakarta plain; ancient Hindu temples dotting the landscape of central Java; dramatic changes in the flora and fauna of the archipelago east of the Lombok Straits; and flying eastwards across an endless string of islands till East Timor. Then there was the celebrity *Harmony Band* of gently ageing rockers in which I joined Agum Gumelar, Chappy Hakim, J.B.

Kristiadi, Humanyubosha, Skip Boyce, James Sinclair and Tato Barata at high profile charity performances.<sup>1</sup> There were also several vernissages of art exhibitions of my wife Mrinalini, most memorable among them being at the Koi Gallery in Kemang.



*Tanah Lot temple in Bali, Indonesia. Source: Wikipedia/ James Mason-Hudson*

This impressionistic listing would be incomplete without a mention of the concluding ritual of all high-level meetings: a gesture from the Indonesian dignitary to partake a few sips of cold tea! And finally, another anecdote from the hallowed folklore of diplomatic protocol: the first Indian Ambassador agreeing to swap the vehicle code "CD 12" which he had been allotted for being the very first plenipotentiary to arrive in Indonesia with "CD 13", at the behest of his American counterpart who cited Christian belief – and a storm in the Caucuses which delayed his arrival – to gain this privilege!

This may be a selective series of recollections, but it offers a window into my sojourn in the verdant islands of Indonesia, teeming with the abundance of nature and humankind. As our two great Asian nations march forward

---

<sup>1</sup> The 'Harmony Band' comprised Indonesian Communications Minister Agum Gumelar, Air Chief Marshal Chappy Hakim, Finance Secretary J.B. Kristiadi, Commissioner of Caltex Indonesia Humanyubosha, US Ambassador Skip Boyce, Ambassador of Chile James Sinclair, Indian Ambassador Hemant Krishan Singh and professional musician Tato Barata.

together, they will prosper by remaining true to their shared belief in "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*": plural societies need more democratic freedoms under equal protection and more local autonomies to prosper and empower their people, who are a nation's greatest resource. By 2050, India and Indonesia will be among the leading flag bearers of a resurgent Asia.







**Delhi Policy Group**  
Core 5A, 1st Floor,  
India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road  
New Delhi - 110003  
India

[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)