

INDIA'S 70TH REPUBLIC DAY

India, Indonesia celebrate 70 years of close friendship

The Republic of India turns 70 this year. India and its close maritime neighbor and strategic partner Indonesia are also celebrating the 70th anniversary of diplomatic ties this year. To learn more about these two important celebrations, **The Jakarta Post's Veeramalla Anjaiah** recently interviewed **Indian Ambassador to Indonesia Pradeep Kumar Rawat** in Jakarta. The following are the excerpts of the interview.

Question: The Republic of India is already 70 years old. What were the most important achievements of the Republic during the last seven decades?

Answer: India will be celebrating the 70th Republic Day on Jan. 26, 2019. For me, the single biggest achievement of the Republic has been to demonstrate to the world that values of democracy, pluralism, rule of law and inclusiveness can thrive under all circumstances, howsoever challenging these might be. None of the pressures - diversity of religions and languages, its big size and large population with relatively low levels of literacy, the need for rapid economic growth from a very low base, and the magnitude of internal or external security challenges - could waiver the faith of Indian people in democratic values.

India has made progress in many other sectors in the last seven decades. India's Green Revolution to make India self-sufficient in food grain production and India's White Revolution making India the largest producer of milk in the world are significant achievements in agriculture and the dairy industry.

Near-complete electrification, the eradication of polio, more than doubling the life expectancy, enhancing the literacy rate sevenfold and becoming the fastest-growing economy in the world are some of the other major achievements.

In the high-technology fields, India's achievements have also been significant. India is regarded as a country with advanced nuclear and space technology. In terms of

information technology talent, India is among the leading countries.

Officially, India and Indonesia are celebrating the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between them. What are the major milestones in this special relationship?

The shared past is visible in many facets - cuisine, language and religious and cultural ethos. Our two peoples cooperated in our common struggle against colonialism. India was among the first countries to establish a diplomatic presence in Yogyakarta when it became the capital of the Indonesian Republic. India organized an international conference in support of Indonesia in 1947. Indonesia's Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir attended and addressed the Conference. India co-sponsored a resolution in the UN in July 1947 asking for stoppage of Dutch military action against the Republic of Indonesia. Indian freedom fighter Biju Patnaik's daredevil act in flying PM Sjahrir out of Indonesia to New Delhi and enabling him to address an international Press Conference in Delhi and then travelling to New York to speak at the United Nations Security Council is well known. Our two countries, thereafter joined hands in building Asian solidarity, which resulted in the 1955 Bandung Conference and the birth of Non-Aligned Movement.

In recent times, our two countries have established a New Comprehensive and Strategic Partnership during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to In-



JP/Arief Suhardiman

Pradeep Kumar Rawat

donesia in May 2018. In the defense field, we have expanded our engagement across diverse areas. The first bilateral naval exercises were held in 2018 and the first-ever naval ship from India visited Sabang Port in Aceh. We have also made progress in building connectivity between Aceh and Andaman & Nicobar Islands with the successful completion of the first commercial cargo ship journey between these two regions. In 2019, as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of our bilateral relations, we hope to further build on the momentum of deepening of ties.

India is a good neighbor and a strategic partner of Indonesia. Economic ties, especially bilateral trade, grew by leaps and bounds during the last 10 years. How do you foresee the growth of economic ties in the next five years?

Indonesia is a key economic partner for India in Southeast Asia. With bilateral trade of more than \$20 billion in 2017-18, and has witnessed more-than-fivefold increase since 2005-06. We have set a target to take bilateral trade to \$50 billion by 2025.

The overall investment scenario in Indonesia is encouraging. It is an attractive destination for Indian investment in the region. As per Indonesian statistics, India has invested around \$1 billion from 2000-2018. India is very apprecia-

tive of President Joko Widodo's vision of infrastructure development in Indonesia. Indian companies are keen to contribute to capacity-building, the transfer of technology and human resource development of Indonesia.

The Indian economy, on the other hand, boasts a stable annual growth rate and a favorable policy regime that have ensured steady foreign capital flow into the country. I urge the Indonesian companies to explore the opportunities of investing in infrastructure and manufacturing in India, particularly in downstream manufacturing industries for coal, palm oil and rubber, which are exported to India in large volumes.

Last year, President Widodo visited India and Prime Minister Modi visited Indonesia to strengthen bilateral ties. How significant were these two high-profile visits in shaping the strategic partnership between India and Indonesia?

The last one year has been an unprecedented one in terms of high-level political exchanges between India and Indonesia. We have had President Widodo and Prime Minister meeting twice bilaterally within the same year, which has never happened before.

Our leaders had a productive engagement when they met in May 2018 in Jakarta. The two sides were able to conclude eight government-to-government and six business-to-business agreements covering a wide spectrum of bilateral cooperation. For the first time in the ASEAN region, both our countries arrived at a Shared Vision of the Indo Pacific. We are happy to note that several concrete steps have taken place since May 2018 to deepen economic and people-to-people exchanges.

We have made significant progress in enhancing physical and



Courtesy of the Indian Embassy

Close ties: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (left) shakes hands with Indonesian President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo at the Presidential Palace in Jakarta during Modi's state visit to Indonesia on May 30, 2018.

economic connectivity between Aceh province of Indonesia and Andaman & Nicobar Islands of India. Our defense exchanges have deepened substantially, and we were privileged to stand by Indonesia in the aftermath of the Palu earthquake and tsunami, through our Operation *Samudra Maitri*. The task for us now is to ensure that deals struck last year can achieve their stated aims efficiently and fairly to foster tighter economic and political cooperation between our two countries.

After a long effort, Indian tourists are finally coming to Indonesia, but very few Indonesians visit India every year. What are your plans to attract Indonesian tourists to India?

Growth [in the number] of Indian tourists to Indonesia has been quite remarkable. It has crossed the half a million mark in 2018.

In Bali, India stands in third position in terms of tourist arrivals. The Visa on Arrival facility for Indian tourists for 30 days extended by the Indonesian side and the introduction of direct flights between Bali and Mumbai have helped encourage Indians to visit Indonesia.

For Indonesian tourists going to India, Prime Minister announced free e-Visas during his visit to Indonesia in May 2018. This has attracted a substantial number of Indonesians visiting India. Last year, the Indian Em-

bassy has conducted Visit India Tourism seminars in major cities of Indonesia, like Bandung, Malang, Surabaya and Yogyakarta. These seminars were attended by representative of leading tour and travel companies and airlines from Indonesia and India.

Do you have any special message for the Indian community and Indonesians on the occasion of the two big celebrations?

The Indian community in Indonesia has played an invaluable role in cementing the bridges of friendship between our two countries. They have contributed in their own unique ways to promoting bilateral trade, investment, cultural exchanges and culinary heritage. Today, we have nearly a dozen Indian community organizations spread across the landscape of Indonesia. All these Indian community associations came together to welcome Prime Minister of India to Indonesia in May 2018 at the Jakarta Convention Center. They have also kept their respective festivals and cultural traditions of India alive in Indonesia over centuries. The establishment of the Little India Gate in Medan was one such unique initiative in 2018. I wish the Indian community all success and would encourage them to continue their good work in further strengthening the bonds of friendship between our two great countries.

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