

Forging stronger Indonesia-UK ties

By H.E. DR RIZAL SUKMA

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RIZAL SUKMA was a Chevening Award recipient, and earned his doctorate degree in 1997 from the London School of Economics and Political Science. He was appointed Indonesian Ambassador to the UK by President Joko Widodo in December 2015. Dr Sukma began his career at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Indonesia, and has held the post of Executive Director at the Centre. He also served as Head of the Working Group on Defence, Intelligence, and Foreign Affairs at the Transition House of the Elected President of Indonesia from July to October 2014.

British innovation and creativity inspire us. Indonesians admire the United Kingdom as one of the world’s centres for finance, commodity trading, arts, music and education, to name a few. As the United Kingdom is important to Indonesia, we are eager to step up its already solid relations with the United Kingdom, based on mutual respect and equality, shared values and common interests, for the benefits of our two peoples.

The first English sailor to reach Indonesia, in 1579, was Sir Francis Drake, who landed in the Moluccas Islands, during his circumnavigation of the globe. Back then, one needed to endure a lengthy and arduous journey by sea, before reaching what were once known as the “Spice Islands” to conduct trade for their rare commodity of spices, notably pepper, nutmeg and cloves. Now, 437 years later, it takes less than 14 hours non-stop to fly directly from London to Jakarta. And Indonesia has a lot more to offer than ever before.

This week, President Joko Widodo visits the United Kingdom to further increase political, economic and socio-cultural relations between the two nations. This visit follows Prime Minister David Cameron’s successful visit to Jakarta in July 2015. Despite our

long history and strong relations since formal ties were established in 1949, many doors still remain to be opened between our two countries.

President Joko Widodo represents a modern, vibrant and democratic Indonesia, with a population of more than 250 million. Located on the equator of Southeast Asia and bridging the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, Indonesia is the largest archipelagic nation in the world, with about 17,000 islands (both named and unnamed) sprawling across two million square kilometres of land and sea. Indonesia’s future lies with our maritime nature and its many possibilities.

Our culture furthermore reflects our diverse geography. With a moderate Muslim majority population, our heritage also recognises and respects other religions and faiths. It is no wonder that the friendliness and hospitality of Indonesians originates from the warm climate and generous resources of our land and sea.

Indonesia’s and Britain’s shared values and common interests are reflected in our status as members of the G20, each representing the world’s most important emerging and developed economies. We are ideal partners to build a strategic bridge between



Sir Francis Drake, the first English sailor to reach Indonesia, visiting Sultan Baabullah in 1579

Asia-Pacific and Europe within an interconnected global network.

A strategic partnership currently exists between Indonesia and the UK, encompassing: 1) trade; 2) investment; 3) education; 4) environment; and 5) democracy and inter-religious dialogue. Additional priorities also include: 1) defence; 2) creative industries; and 3) energy. In a meeting between President Joko Widodo and Prime Minister Cameron in 2015, the focus of cooperation was sharpened with the signing of four Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) in the fields of: 1) maritime; 2) police cooperation in combating terrorism and cross-border crimes; 3) research and innovation; and 4) civil space activities.


In implementing this important strategic partnership, the two nations share several intersecting interests which can become important modalities in forging ahead in the near future:

- Indonesia and the UK are both maritime nations which share the same concern about the freedom and safety of navigation, the utilisation of the sea as an economic and trade asset, and the preservation of maritime resources. Both countries are also interested in pursuing further cooperation in the shipping industry, which includes port management, maritime technology, and maritime security;
- Both countries are complementary markets, which shows the importance of pursuing efforts to increase trade activities between the two countries to achieve the target of US\$6 billion by 2019. The UK sees East Asia, and Indonesia in particular, as an emerging economic priority, while Indonesia sees the UK as a source of

investment and a market for Indonesian products;

- The UK has a well established higher education system and reliable technology sector, while Indonesia is currently focusing on the importance of education and technology development;
- Indonesia and the UK are both democracies, thus the importance of interaction between the citizens of both nations, especially through tourism and inter-faith dialogue;
- The UK has a strong interest in ensuring that Indonesia remains stable, and emphasises the unity of Indonesia's territorial integrity. Britain also has an interest in the safety and security of the Strait of Malacca, a vital sea line of communication through which British exports to China, Japan and the Republic of Korea pass; and
- Indonesia and the UK are committed to address global health issues, climate change, cross-border crime, and terrorism.

The whole team at the Embassy and I are truly committed and honoured to offer our services in broadening and strengthening bilateral relations between our two democracies. We strive to provide as professionally as we can the many services that are expected from the Embassy as the main gateway to Indonesia. By working together with our partners here, we can strive towards a strengthened relationship, mutually beneficial cooperation and a brighter future.

We invite you to rediscover Indonesia, and experience your own unique adventure. Why not? It is visa-free for tourists, and it only takes 14 hours to fly non-stop to Jakarta from London. 

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Rt Hon David Cameron MP, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom with HE Joko Widodo during his visit to Indonesia