

Opening Statement

by

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at

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On behalf of the Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi and the delegation members, let me express our gratitude to the Indonesian Council on World Affairs (ICWA) for its gracious invitation, admirable arrangements and generous hospitality. We are delighted to be in this magnificent city once again.

2. Our two nations are in the process of undergoing some churning at the political front. While India has just completed the world's biggest democratic election process, the Presidential election in Indonesia will be held soon, following the Parliamentary election held recently. These democratic developments would not only shape the future of India and Indonesia, but also mould the role of these two countries on the world stage. India and Indonesia are indeed in the league of the most powerful Asian nations - demographically, economically and politically.

3. The cultural bridge linking India and Indonesia has been in existence since long. It operates at several levels, including ideas, religion, art, architecture, music, popular drama, literature, and shared history.

4. Colonialism brought India and Indonesia under the British and Dutch rule respectively. The rise of the Indian freedom struggle during which Indian leaders began to take active interest in Southeast Asian affairs brought new facets of engagement. For instance, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru organized and celebrated 'Southeast Asia Day' at Lucknow on 24 October 1945, and expressed solidarity with Indonesia. The Asian Relations Conference 1947, the Conference on Indonesia 1949, and the Bandung Conference 1955 served as important milestones in Asian solidarity. In all these events, our institution – the Indian Council of World Affairs – was deeply involved.

5. Pandit Nehru, the future first prime minister of India, addressing the Asian Relations Conference on 24 March 1947 in Delhi, referred to "that deeper urge to the mind and spirit of Asia which has persisted in spite of the isolationism which grew up during the years of European domination." He stressed: "Ours is the great design of promoting peace and progress all over the world." Nehru welcomed observers from countries across Southeast Asia, pointing out: "We

have many problems in common, especially in the Pacific and in the Southeast region of Asia, and we have to cooperate together to find solutions.” We are happy to be here, bearing goodwill and showing determination to build further on cooperative ties that have happily developed between our two countries since Nehru’s times.

6. In the past decades, especially since India initiated its Look East policy in early 1990s, our two countries have undergone many transformations. Our policies towards the world and particularly towards each other have factored in major changes in global politics. India’s comprehensive engagement with the Southeast Asian region accords due importance to Indonesia. Cultural interaction, trade ties and converging interests on bilateral and international issues have formed the bedrock of our mutual connection.

7. For India, Indonesia is a nation of immense importance. Apart from being a close neighbour, Indonesia is a significant emerging power. A country stretching as wide as the United States, yours is the fourth-most populous country in the world. Over one third of all Southeast Asians live in Indonesia. Like India, Indonesia is continually shaped by geographic, ethnic, linguistic and social diversity. One of the most striking features that bind us together is *Bhinneka Tunggal Eka* which we in India know as ‘Unity in Diversity.’ Clearly, remarkable similarities exist in our approaches on numerous questions of contemporary significance.

8. As a fine example of democracy in the comity of Muslim nations, Indonesia’s stature has risen in recent times. Within the Organization of Islamic Conference, Indonesia represents a moderating voice, which is much needed in our times. At the regional level, Indonesia has been playing the role of a leader and a sensitive mediator on crucial issues.

9. In this broad context, let me briefly delineate India’s worldview as reflected in its contemporary foreign and security policy. India favours a multi-polar Asia within a multi-polar world, which is peaceful, tolerant and progressive. The inter-linkages between security and sustainable growth and development drive our foreign policy. India adopts a holistic approach, blending purposeful pro-activism in bilateral affairs, enlightened multilateralism and active interest in working through institutions such as ASEAN, ARF, ADMM Plus, EAS, G-20, IORA,

UN and others. 'Strategic Autonomy' drives and shapes our innate impulse towards independence of judgment and examining every issue on its merits. We are motivated by values and pragmatism and prefer to judge nations by their actions rather than mere rhetoric. Significantly, India's commitment to peace and peaceful co-existence does not preclude vigilance and our readiness to face all other eventualities. Finally, our external relations are managed in such a manner that the economic development dimension is kept in constant focus.

10. Our dialogue today will revolve around numerous significant themes: the international situation; the geo-political landscape in your and our sub-regions within the larger Asia-Pacific or Indo-Pacific region; the prospects of our foreign policies in the wake of elections; assessment of India's relations with ASEAN and; nature and scope of the role of India and Indonesia in international fora and the challenges and opportunities we may face in bilateral relations in the coming decade. I would suggest that we focus, in particular, on examining the reality, potential and likely future directions of the strategic partnership linking India with Indonesia. We are fortunate to have with us a talented, though compact delegation, reflecting the richness and diversity of India's strategic community. Our delegation will listen, reflect, speak, and share, guided by its collective desire to comprehend the views and thinking of the host side and to contribute to further deepening of friendly ties that bind our two nations.

11. Once again, I warmly thank our hosts for their generosity towards us. I wish the Dialogue every success.
