

Opening Remarks

by

Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia

Director General, ICWA

at

Roundtable Discussion on

**‘Indonesia’s Presidential Elections:
Implications for the Region and India’**

Sapru House, New Delhi

11 July, 2014

Indonesia, one of the largest democracies of Asia, has just held its Presidential elections, testifying to its evolution as a mature democracy. Its civilizational mosaic, multicultural and multi-religious ethos and increasingly decentralising federal structure of domestic polity have strengthened Indonesia's position in the world. However, debate continues whether Indonesia would be able to emerge as a regional or even a trans-regional power, with strong economic and political fundamentals. Another question is whether the shadow of former military personnel would loom large in the polity or civilian politicians would get the control.



(L-R) Shri Sunanda K Datta-Ray, Ambassador Navrekha Sharma, Ambassador Rajiv Sikri, Ambassador Rajiv K Bhatia, DG, ICWA, Prof. Baladas Ghoshal , Prof. P.V. Rao

2. On 9 July 2014, Indonesia went through its third direct Presidential Elections since the collapse of the Suharto regime in 1998. The final round of the election was held between Joko Widodo- Jusuf Kalla and Prabowo Subianto- Hatta Radjasa. Joko Widodo, a businessman, is governor of Jakarta whose running mate was former Vice-President Jusuf Kalla. The other duo was Prabowo Subianto and Hatta Radjasa. Prabowo is a former Army General, while Hatta is a

former Minister for Economic Affairs. Political parties, across the board, have supported one or the other set of candidates, who are from PDI-P and Gerindra respectively. In the final days of the campaign, the contest became quite close. In the end, it was regarded as an election too close to call.

3. Indonesia, as a state, has faced complex problems pertaining to balancing religious radicalism and secular fundamentals. However, due credit should be given to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono for creating the necessary impetus for Indonesia to grow economically and to attain the much needed stability after the Suharto's departure from the political scene.

4. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono had his share of problems ranging from the corrupt bureaucracy, police and security agencies, and even a hostile judiciary. However, the return of the Indonesian military to barracks and the resolution of long impending issues such as Aceh showcased the picture of an accommodative and considerate former general who has been instrumental in triggering Indonesia's transformation. The foreign and economic policy also projected a balancing attitude of the Indonesian polity, which was negotiating with both the US and China in order to protect its national and regional interests. One may assert that President Yudhoyono's term was satisfactory on the whole. For most of political analysts, it was the dawn of a new era.

5. For India, which recently witnessed the biggest democratic exercise in the world, Indonesia's election process is significant. India is now taking new directions. For Indonesia too, the elections manifest the hope for millions. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen how the new Indonesian President steers the economy, national policy, foreign policy and now he fulfills the hopes of millions of Indonesian citizens.

6. More importantly, just like India, Indonesian elections have showed the power of the media, both traditional and new. For instance, in the course of Presidential elections, candidates tried to influence and even launched several media channels. The role of social media platforms such as Twitter, Face book and others made it an election of images, perceptions and expectations.

7. For India, Indonesia is of immense strategic importance. One of the major strategic partners of India in Asia, Indonesia is India's maritime neighbour, and has been growing at a fast pace. Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world after China, India and the United States. Over one third of all Southeast Asians are Indonesian citizens.

8. ICWA has been striving to strengthen India's relations with other countries through an insightful use of Track-II dialogues. While special attention has been given to South Asia, countries in East Asia such as Indonesia also figure in the priority list. In this regard, we have organized a number of significant events, which include: a public lecture by Dr. R. M. Marty M. Natalegawa, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Indonesia on July 27, 2012; the first trilateral dialogue (TDIO) among India, Australia and Indonesia on September 19-20, 2013; and the Delhi Dialogue V, held in February 2013, also witnessed the presence of representatives from Indonesia including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During our flagship annual event, Asian Relations Conference held in March 2013, scholars from Indonesia also participated and presented papers, demonstrating a remarkable synergy between the strategic community of India and of Indonesia.

9. During the visit to Indonesia by former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation between the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) and the Indonesian Council on World Affairs (ICWA) was signed in Jakarta. As a follow-up, in May 2014, ICWA sent a five-member delegation to Indonesia for dialogue with its MoU partner. During our interactions, it was apparent that India and Indonesia share a common worldview and our futures are tied together. During the deliberations, I presented a case for the Look East policy (LEP) 3.0, highlighting its salience in the foreign policy of India. I stated that East Asia Summit (EAS) has the potential to become the single most important forum for free exchange of views amongst the top leaders. In essence, the practitioners and experts from both the sides highlighted the need for each country to give more attention to the other. Today's Round Table Discussion is a part of our continuing endeavours to broaden knowledge about India-Indonesia relations.

10. This Round Table Discussion will revolve around numerous significant themes, with a sharp focus on four of them which will be duly addressed by our four distinguished panelists. These themes are: i) Indonesia's Presidential Elections: Implications for the Region; ii) Imaging Indonesia; iii) Indonesian Presidential Elections in the National Context; and iv) Post-election Indonesia: Prospects for India- Indonesia Relations.

11. I wish this Round Table all the success.

Thank you very much for your kind attention!

