



THE 60th ANNIVERSARY of



INDONESIA~MYANMAR DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

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Message from Indonesian Ambassador

A new milestone in our friendly relations

By Sebastianus Sumarsono

INDONESIA and Myanmar are two friendly countries with longstanding tradition of close communion. As two nation states, Indonesia and Myanmar have mutual recognition and support for each other based on common understanding since their struggle for independence. Indonesia proclaimed its independence on August 17th, 1945 and Myanmar gained its independence on January 4th, 1948. Since then, the brotherly relations of the two countries have grown in harmony with the dynamics of life, within the social system between nations of the world.

The relations between the two countries have been much closer with the establishment of ASEAN, which Myanmar later became a member in 1997. A more transparent relation between nations as a result of the advancement of science and technology, especially information, had never lessened the intensity of the relations between Indonesia and Myanmar which had been established by their founding fathers. Both countries still maintain the tradition to support each other, both bilaterally and multilaterally.

Indonesia and Myanmar formally opened their diplomatic relations on 27 December 1949. Their abilities to maintain 60 years of diplomatic relations is somewhat admirable, but it required a lot of efforts, dedication and a full common understanding. In the journey of friendship, the dynamics and ups and downs are of course unavoidable due to the variety of points of view and way of life among nations of

the world, which are filled with each other's political interest.

Since assigned as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Indonesia to the Union of Myanmar, and followed by the handover of Credential Letter from President Dr. H. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to Senior General Than Shwe



Indonesian Ambassador Mr. Sebastianus Sumarsono

on August 13th, 2008, I have set a vision for the future of enhancement of bilateral relationship between Indonesia and Myanmar that is mutually beneficial, independent and dignified. Based on the defined vision and mission, various programs and activities are already implemented in order to enhance the quality of bilateral relations which include political, economic, socio-cultural, consular, and defense and security aspects.

In order to maintain and enhance the relations of both people and countries, the said aspects of life need to be carried out in balance and support each other. But in regards of the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of brotherly relations of the two states, I would like to highlight only the socio-cultural aspect,

considering that it will give positive contribution for a closer political, economic, consular, and security and defense relations of both countries. Therefore, on 27 December 2009, socio-cultural approach was the main event for celebrating our diplomatic relations.

If we look at the diversity and social conditions of both countries, we might consider that Indonesia and Myanmar have similar socio-cultural backgrounds. Many historical heritages with Hindu and Buddhist influence can be found in both countries. Even though the majority of the people of both countries now embrace different religions, Indonesians are mostly Moslems and Myanmar people are Buddhist, the shared cultural heritage is the doorway of the dynamics of life that will continue to transform according to its values. However, we can witness and sense how the life of communities with ethics, respecting elders, etcetera, displays the closeness of culture between the people and nations of Indonesia and Myanmar.

Therefore, in conjunction to the anniversary of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Myanmar on December 27, 2009, we were honored to present arts and cultural shows from both countries in effort to create a better close relationship, not only as true friends, but also as family. The cultural and arts performance presented included traditional dances from Indonesia and Myanmar, fashion show of traditional Indonesian wedding costumes and Myanmar ethnic costumes. At the end and as a climax, I was honored to present a song that I personally wrote entitled "Membangun Persahabatan" or "To Build A Friendship" which was performed both in Bahasa Indonesia and Myanmar language by a joint choir. The song is about the historical similarities that Indonesia and Myanmar have. Even though both countries have their own diversities, with many different ethnics, Myanmar have 135 ethnics and Indonesia have more than 250 ethnics, but both are able to build a strong and dignified state.

It is hoped that the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations would enable us to build a new milestone for our friendly relations towards a better, stronger, more peaceful, more equal and more prosperous future.



President Dr Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Senior General Than Shwe at the parliament building in Yangon during the Indonesian President's visit in March, 2006.

Sixty years of struggle and bilateral friendship

At the Beginning

The proclamation of independence by the Indonesian people in 1945 did not automatically end the nation's struggle to gain sovereignty. The Dutch unceasingly carry out propagandas in effort to put down Indonesia's position in the international forum. To counter the issue and in struggling for the existence of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), the Indonesian Government intensified its diplomatic activity by making step wise approach and cultivating good relations with many countries as a way of resistance, including with Myanmar.

Exchange of visits was done between government officials of the two countries, one of which was the dispatch of Honorable Thakin Tha Kin (Parliamentary Secretary of Socialist Party) to Yogyakarta - temporary capital of Indonesia at the time - to convey the support of the Myanmar Government on Indonesia's struggle of independence. The Government of Myanmar then came into conclusion that an international conference needed to be held in order to assist Indonesia. And so, on the third week of January 1949 the Asian Conference on Indonesia was held in New Delhi.

It was not the only time Myanmar showed support through its fine individuals. Many of them have given moral and material assistance to the Indonesian diplomats. The bond of friendship felt by the Indonesian diplomats was not only received from high-ranking officials, but also from the people of Myanmar. The diplomats were in the condition of having nothing to live by but strong and pure will to fight for sovereignty, yet the support of the Myanmar people was

extraordinary. Proof of solidarity between the two nations was displayed in the form of accommodation, access to participation in Myanmar's field of political elite, and lenience on various rules that are obligatory for visitors of the country.

Another historical event between the two countries was when Myanmar accepted the RI-001 "Seulawah" aircraft and granted flight permit for it to serve as semi-commercial flight, under the banner of Indonesian Airways. It was considered to be semi-commercial since its objectives are not merely to gain profit but it also has political value. Today, one of the aircraft of Indonesian Airways, the RI-007, is properly kept in the Tatmadaw Museum in Yangon.

Stronger Bond

Diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Myanmar was established on 27 December 1949, marked by the opening of "Indonesian House" in Yangon, which was later upgraded into the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia on April 1950. On the occasion, President Soekarno conveyed his appreciation for the merit of the Myanmar Government and people in supporting NKRI. He hailed Myanmar as "a comrade in arms and partisan for aspiration of true independence". In 1951, Indonesia and Myanmar signed "Treaty of Friendship" which was later ratified on 2 October 1952, through Law No.18/1952 on the Approval of the Treaty of Friendship between the Republic of Indonesia and the Union of Burma.

Later on, Indonesia as one of ASEAN member nations stated its support for the inclusion of Myanmar into the regional organization. As fellow members of ASEAN and brothers in arms,

Indonesia also strongly supports Myanmar's democratization process. Furthermore, Indonesia consistently carried-out "constructive engagement" to assist Myanmar in resolving its political crisis. In return, Myanmar also supports Indonesia's interest in all international forums.

Maintaining the Brotherhood

The relations between Indonesia and Myanmar are kept well-tied, indicated by the exchange of visits by the leaders of both countries. President Soeharto conducted state visits to Myanmar, and General Ne Win made state visits to Indonesia. Afterward, Senior General Than Shwe had also carried out three state visits to Indonesia. Subsequently, three Indonesian Presidents made state visits to Myanmar. The latest visit was made by President Dr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on 1-2 March 2006. In response, Myanmar Prime Minister General Thein Sein made a state visit to Indonesia on 16-17 March 2009.

During the visit of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Indonesia-Myanmar bilateral relations have entered a new dawn when N. Hassan Wirajuda, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, and U Nyan Win, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Union of Myanmar, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Bilateral Cooperation between Myanmar and Indonesia on 1 March 2006 in Yangon. The MOU has enabled Indonesia and Myanmar to promote bilateral cooperation in the sectors of defense and security, economy, trade and investment, energy and mines, forestry, agriculture, fisheries, transportation, education and training, and tourism.



Cultural and art performance at Indonesian International School Yangon. Pic: Indonesian Embassy



Bilateral trade reaches US\$308 million in 2008

INDONESIA is the largest archipelago country in the world, consists of five main islands (Sumatera, Kalimantan/Borneo, Java, Sulawesi/Celebes and Irian Jaya/Papua) and some 30 smaller archipelagos, totaling about 17,508 islands and islets of which about 6,000 are inhabited.

The population is estimated at 240 million with a growth rate of 1.5 percent annually. There are about 250 ethnic groups in Indonesia with more than 250 languages and dialects spoken and written. Nevertheless, to understand each other, the people communicate in the official language called Bahasa Indonesia (literally meaning the language of Indonesia). Although the Bahasa Indonesia has been regarded as the Lingua Franca, yet local languages are equally valid. Therefore, the greater parts of the Indonesian nationals are bilingual.

In the trade area, the

government put emphasis on the exports of non-oil and gas commodities such as furniture, wood, coffee, cocoa, rubber, textiles, machinery and electrical goods, steel, automotives, pulp and paper, organic chemical, footwear, marine products, edible oil and plastics. Whereas, Indonesia imports various products ranging from capital goods to consumer goods. From machinery, agricultural products, chemical to electronics, vehicles and personal consumer products.

Trade relations

It is to be seen that bilateral economic relations between Myanmar and Indonesia have been further upgraded with trade and commerce between the two nations progressing at a steady rate. Myanmar and Indonesian entrepreneurs are now seeing business opportunities in each other's country. With the encouragement of the two

governments, person-to-person contacts among businessmen are increasing considerably. It is definite that as these contacts in the economic sector expand, the overall friendly ties between Myanmar and Indonesia will be further enhanced to a large degree.

Myanmar imports from Indonesia are palm oil, other paper, chemicals & vegetable oil, vehicles and their parts, chemical products, pharmaceuticals, plastic raw materials, newsprint paper, iron and steel materials, tyre and tube etc. On the other side, Myanmar exports to Indonesia are fish and prawn, vegetables, fruits and nuts, wood and wood product, straw, man-made staple fibers, apparel – net knitted, stone/plaster/cement, jewelry, copper and copper product, furniture, works of art, cereals, ores, oil seeds, misc. chornical products, other animal products, beans, lacquerware and Buddha statue, zinc oxide agriculture,

rice.

Bilateral trade between the two countries starting from the fiscal year 2005- 2006 to 2008- 2009 (up to February), the volume of trade is increasing every year. Especially in 2007-2008, the total trade volume reached US\$ 307.792 million (the highest among these five years). Balance of trade situation, except the year 2005-2006, it is in favor of Indonesia.

Indonesia's investment

According to the statistics of Myanmar Investment Commission, the total foreign investment in Myanmar up to 31 March 2009 is amounted over US\$ 15,726.043 million. Amongst that Indonesia ranks 9th position with the amount of US\$ 241.497 million with 12 permitted Enterprises. That amount is 1.54 percent of total foreign investment in Myanmar. – *Economic Section, Indonesian Embassy*



Pic: Google Image

Indonesian President Dr Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono greets Myanmar Prime Minister General Thein Sein in Jakarta during the latter's visit in March, 2009.

Batik: a symbol of Indonesia's pride

BATIK is a cloth which traditionally uses a manual wax-resist dyeing technique. Due to modern advances in the textile industry, the term has been extended to include fabrics which incorporate traditional batik patterns even if they are not produced using the wax-resist dyeing techniques. Silk batik is especially popular.

The process of creating a motive for batik cloth is not easy and cannot be done instantly. The motive should contain philosophical value as an expression of will and work that makes each feature has its own meaning. In this regard, batik should be worn by bearing in mind the philosophy it contains as behavioral guidance.

Certain batik motives are believed to have supernatural powers and can only be worn by specific individuals. For example, the *Parang* or cleaver motive which symbolizes strength and power can only be worn by rulers and knights. This kind of batik should be made with calmness and great patience. It is also believed that any mistake made in the process will remove the supernatural power of the batik.

Javanese traditional batik, especially from Yogyakarta and Surakarta, has special meanings rooted to the Javanese conceptualization of the universe. Traditional colours include indigo, dark brown, and white which represent the three major Hindu Gods (Brahmā, Visnu, and Uiva). This is related to the fact that natural dyes are only available in indigo and brown. Certain patterns can only be worn by nobility; traditionally, wider stripes or wavy lines of greater



Pic: Google Image

A model showing off a Kimono design of Indonesian batik.

width indicated higher rank. Consequently, during Javanese ceremonies, one could determine the royal lineage of a person by the cloth he or she was wearing. Other regions of Indonesia have their own unique patterns which normally take themes from everyday lives, incorporating patterns such as flowers, nature, animals, folklore or people. The colours of *pesisir* batik, from the coastal cities of northern Java, is especially vibrant, and it absorbs influence from the Javanese, Arab, Chinese and Dutch culture. In the colonial times *pesisir* batik was a favorite of the *Peranakan* Chinese, Dutch and Eurasians.

In Indonesia, batik popularity has its ups and downs. Historically it was essential for ceremonial

costumes and it was worn as part of a kebaya dress, which was commonly worn every day. According to Professor Michael Hitchcock of the University of Chichester (UK), batik "has a strong political dimension. The batik shirt was invented as a formal non-Western shirt for men in Indonesia in the 1960s. It waned from the 1960s onwards, because more and more women chose western clothes. However, batik clothing has revived somewhat in the 21st century, due to the effort of Indonesian fashion designers to innovate the kebaya by incorporating new colors, fabrics, and patterns. Batik is a fashion item for many young people in Indonesia, such as a shirt, dress, or scarf for casual wear. For a formal occasion,

a kebaya is standard for women. It is also acceptable for men to wear batik in the office or as a replacement for jacket-and-tie at certain receptions.

In one form or another, batik has worldwide popularity. Nelson Mandela wears a batik shirt on formal occasions, the South Africans call it a Madiba shirt. The Malaysian singer Siti Nurhaliza wore an Indonesian kebaya and batik on her wedding day. The late mother of United States president Barack Obama, Ann Dunham was an avid collector of Batik. In 2009, an exhibition of Dunham's textile batik art collection (*A Lady Found a Culture in its Cloth: Barack Obama's Mother and Indonesian Batiks*) toured six museums in the United States, finishing the tour at the Textile Museum.

UNESCO designated Indonesian batik as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity on October 2, 2009. As part of the acknowledgment, UNESCO insisted that Indonesia preserve the heritage. To celebrate the acknowledgement, the President of the Republic of Indonesia Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono called on the nation to wear batik for the day. Even Indonesians abroad acclaimed and joined the celebration by also wearing batik on that day.

Batik or fabrics with the traditional batik patterns are also found in several countries such as Malaysia, Japan, China, India, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal, and Singapore. In Myanmar, batik is a popular decorative cloth for *longyi* and Indonesian batik in particular has a great vogue.

– *Wikipedia and other sources*

Art and cultural performance in 2009

By Rahman Priaelmu, Principal of IISY

ON 3 December 2009, the Indonesian International School Yangon (IISY) held its second Art and Culture Performance. Over 1500 people were delightfully entertained by the students performing at a stage built in the school's compound in Ahlone Township. The performance was held also to embellish the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relationship between Indonesia and Myanmar.

At the opening of the event, a traditional Indonesian welcoming dance performed by

students carried out a musical performance by playing two Indonesian musical instruments called *angklung* and *arumba* (similar to the xylophone, but made from bamboo). The lively and entertaining performance set the ambience for the rest of the afternoon. Students from kindergarten, primary, secondary and high school showcased their talents with a range of acts such as singing, dancing and acting. Guided by their teachers, the students had tirelessly prepared and rehearsed for the show. The standard was for the most part, exceptional. The students displayed a composure and skill that is a credit to them and the school. They demonstrated what can be achieved when students from different cultural backgrounds work together in a spirit of harmony and teamwork.

Perhaps the overall success of the day was the harmonious spirit of teamwork as people from Indonesia, Myanmar and other countries worked to produce a performance that sent a message of goodwill and peace. And not only that, but given the context, an educational message as well. It demonstrated that education not only embraces academic studies, but also seeks to develop the artistic and musical talents of the students.

This performance represents the personification of 'international' cooperation between countries. IISY is one of personifications of the relationship between Myanmar and Indonesia. The IISY performance is to be congratulated for most honorable intentions. Well done IISY.

‘Perhaps the overall success of the day was the harmonious spirit of teamwork ...’

Myanmar students and a traditional Myanmar welcoming dance performed by Indonesian students greeted the Ambassador H.E. Mr. Sebastianus Sumarsono and Madam Yosephine Sumarsono. In his opening remarks, the Ambassador stated that the event was "a good opportunity to enhance good relationships and accepting cross-cultural traditions". While I believe that this was an expression of our good will and appreciation of the two cultures.

After the event was formally opened by the Ambassador, the Indonesian