



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



POLICY BRIEF

75 Years of India-Indonesia Relations: Prabowo's State Visit to India

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Cover Photographs:

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi, on January 25, 2025. Source: [X/@MEAIndia](#)

Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto received a ceremonial welcome and Guard of Honour at the Rashtrapati Bhavan forecourt, during his visit to India, from 23 to 26 January 2025. Source: [X/@prabowo](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto held comprehensive bilateral talks in New Delhi, on January 25, 2025. Source: [X/@narendramodi](#)

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75 Years of India-Indonesia Relations: Prabowo's State Visit to India

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Introduction

President Prabowo Subianto, of Indonesia paid a three-day state visit to India from January 23-26, 2025. Coinciding with the 75th anniversary of India-Indonesia diplomatic ties, this was his first official visit to India since assuming office in October 2024.¹ Prabowo was the chief guest at India's 76th Republic Day parade, where a marching contingent of 352 Indonesian Armed Forces personnel also participated. The first Indonesian president to be invited as a chief guest at India's first Republic Day in 1950 was Kusno Sosrodihardjo, 'Sukarno'. Other Indonesian leaders invited as chief guests on the occasion of Republic Day have included Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2011 and Joko Widodo, in 2018, (alongside other ASEAN leaders).²

The visit gathered significant attention in the media as Prabowo was originally scheduled to visit Pakistan immediately after attending the Republic Day events on January 26 in India, drawing concerns on the Indian side which conveyed India's long-standing approach of pursuing each partnership separately and de-hyphenating ties with Pakistan.³

This visit was strategically timed and followed Prabowo's visits to China, the United States, Peru, Brazil, and the UK.⁴ In their talks, President Prabowo and Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed a comprehensive range of issues related to bilateral cooperation, including political, defence and security, maritime, economic, health, digital transition, blue economy, food, and energy security.

¹ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "State Visit of President of Indonesia H.E. Prabowo Subianto to New Delhi as Chief Guest for India's 76th Republic Day (January 25-26, 2025)," January 16, 2025. <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases>.

² Indian Embassy Jakarta – Bilateral Brief. <https://www.indianembassyjakarta.gov.in>

³ The Times of India, "India Looks to Dissuade Indonesian President From Clubbing R-Day Visit With Pakistan Travel", January 10, 2025. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-looks-to-dissuade-indonesian-president-from-clubbing-r-day-visit-with-pakistan-travel/articleshow/117095932.cms>.

⁴ Amb. Biren Nanda-Delhi Policy Group. "Prabowo's Balancing Visits to China and the US Yield Uneven Outcomes," November 28, 2024. <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/publication/policy-briefs/prabowos-balancing-visits-to-china-and-the-us-yield-uneven-outcomes.html>.

The joint statement issued at the conclusion of the visit highlights the growing relationship between India and Indonesia. This brief examines the joint statement and evaluates the highlights of Prabowo's visit.

Key Highlights from the Joint Statement

At the outset, both leaders expressed satisfaction with the robust and dynamic bilateral ties, following the elevation of the relationship to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' in 2018.

The joint statement underlines the upward trajectory of the bilateral relationship of the two countries, building upon the momentum in bilateral ties since the Joint Statement and Maritime Vision released in 2018 at the conclusion of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Indonesia. The leaders reaffirmed that India and Indonesia are "maritime neighbours and strategic partners".

The visit witnessed the conclusion of five Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs). These included an MoU on health cooperation, the renewal of a maritime safety and security cooperation agreement between the Indian Coast Guard and Indonesia's BAKAMLA, and an MoU on traditional medicine quality assurance between India's Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine and Homoeopathy and Indonesia's Food and Drug Authority.⁵

Given the shared interests of India and Indonesia in various sectors, the leaders emphasised the importance of regularly convening bilateral dialogue mechanisms at the leaders' level, ministerial level, and senior officials level.

i. Geopolitical Convergences

The geographical proximity between India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Indonesia's Aceh province makes the two countries well-positioned to ensure peace, stability, and prosperity in the maritime region. In this context, both leaders highlighted three aspects. First, they stressed the freedom of navigation and overflight based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Second, they emphasised the need for an effective implementation of the 'Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea' (DOC)

⁵ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "List of Outcomes: State Visit of President of Indonesia to India (January 23-26, 2025)", January 25, 2025.
https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/38942/List_of_Outcomes

in its entirety. Third, they supported an early conclusion of an effective and substantive Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea.⁶

The joint statement also emphasises the importance of South-South cooperation and complementarities between the 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific' (AOIP) and the 'Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative' (IPOI). The leaders highlighted the importance of coordination in multilateral forums such as the UN, BRICS, IORA, and the G20. Prabowo appreciated India's initiative in organising the 'Voice of Global South Summits'. Apart from focusing on multilateral cooperation and bilateral relations, the trilateral relationship between India, Indonesia, and Australia was also recognised as an important mechanism in addressing common challenges and exchanging views, including in the areas of maritime domain awareness, marine pollution, and the blue economy.⁷ This trilateral cooperation is deemed to be crucial for addressing regional challenges and fostering stability in the Indo-Pacific, and is likely to be strengthened further.

ii. Economic Opportunities

The past few years have witnessed a gradual increase in economic cooperation between the two countries. Indonesia has emerged as the second largest trading partner of India in the ASEAN region. Bilateral trade has grown from US\$ 4.3 billion in 2005–06 to US\$ 38.84 billion in 2022–23 and US\$ 29.40 billion in 2023–24.⁸ The two countries set the goal of achieving a trade volume of US \$ 50 billion by the end of 2025.⁹ To put matters in perspective, India's projected trade volume with Indonesia in 2025 still falls far short of the US \$ 139 billion in trade between China and Indonesia in 2023.¹⁰

In their efforts to boost economic capabilities, both countries are working on public-private investments and forging new partnerships. The leaders expressed support for holding the 2nd meeting of the 'Working Group on Trade and Investment' (WGTI) and the '4th Biennial Trade Ministers' Forum' (BMTF) to address outstanding tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade. They agreed that

⁶ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "India-Indonesia Joint Statement on the State Visit of H.E. Prabowo Subianto, President of Republic of Indonesia (23-26 January 2025)," January 26, 2025. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documnets>.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Indian Embassy Jakarta – Bilateral Brief. <https://www.indianembassyjakarta.gov.in>

⁹ The Times of India. "India, Indonesia Set US \$50 Billion Trade Target by 2025", June 29, 2019. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-indonesia-set-us-50-billion-trade-target-by-2025/articleshow/69999341.cms>.

¹⁰ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Indonesia. "Through the Waves: A New Journey Towards the China-Indonesia Community With a Shared Future", November 7, 2024. http://id.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/sgdt/202411/t20241107_11522634.htm.

the first meeting of the 'Joint Economic and Financial Dialogue' should be held early to further deepen economic engagement. Additionally, they called for the conclusion of the ongoing review of the 'ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement' (AITIGA) by 2025, aiming to enhance trade relations between the two nations.

The leaders welcomed the signing of an 'MoU on Local Currency Settlement Systems' (LCSS) between the Reserve Bank of India and Bank Indonesia in March 2024. They expressed confidence that the usage of local currency for bilateral transactions would further deepen financial integration and promote trade between India and Indonesia.

India and Indonesia continue to cooperate in a range of areas including health and pharmaceuticals, food security, energy security, infrastructure and connectivity, space, education and skill development, culture, climate change and disaster resilience.

iii. Defence and Security Cooperation

Defence is a crucial pillar of bilateral cooperation between India and Indonesia. The leaders welcomed the ratification of the Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA), which was signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Indonesia in 2018. Building upon previous discussions, India expressed its commitment to support Indonesia's ongoing defence modernisation programs through the sharing of experience and expertise. Last year, during the 7th Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC) meeting, the Indonesian delegation had also engaged with Indian defence industry partners, including Bharat Forge, Mahindra Defence, and Mazagaon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd., to explore ways to enhance defence industrial capabilities through research and joint production.¹¹

Maritime security and cooperation is a critical focus area. Among MoUs signed during the visit, one pertains to maritime safety and security cooperation between the Indian Coast Guard and Indonesia's maritime agency, BAKAMLA. The MoU will help in coordinating search and rescue operations upon request, responding to crimes at sea, and promoting capacity-building activities between both countries. To further deepen maritime cooperation, the two nations agreed to position a liaison officer from Indonesia at India's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram. They also encouraged the ongoing discussions on the White Shipping Information

¹¹ PIB. "7th India-Indonesia Joint Defence Cooperation Committee Meeting Held in New Delhi", May 3, 2024. <https://pib.gov.in/PressRelease>.

Exchange agreement. Both countries have enhanced their defence cooperation through initiatives like the India-Indonesia Joint Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) between their navies and the conduct of periodic bilateral Army (Garuda Shakti) and Naval (Samudra Shakti) exercises.¹²

Convergence in the security concerns shared by the two countries was reflected in their commitment to strengthen the architecture of their defence ties. In addition, Prabowo's background as a former defence minister suggests a predisposition towards prioritising security and defence considerations in Indonesia's external relations. This shift will hopefully create significant opportunities for India to further strengthen its existing defence ties with Indonesia.

The leaders unequivocally condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing cooperation in combating this threat through bilateral and multilateral initiatives. They urged all countries to take concerted action against UN-proscribed terrorist organisations and their affiliates. Recognising the evolving nature of security challenges, the two leaders agreed to work together in preventing the spread of online radicalisation and strengthening mechanisms to counter extremist ideologies. They welcomed the 6th Joint Working Group Meeting on Counter-Terrorism, held in Jakarta on August 23, 2024, as a crucial platform for strengthening bilateral cooperation. They also looked forward to the renewal of the MoU on Counter-Terrorism Cooperation. President Prabowo thanked Prime Minister Modi for offering specialised courses by the National Security Guard (NSG) of India, underscoring the value of capacity-building and knowledge-sharing in counter-terrorism efforts.¹³

Missed Opportunities

Despite much pre-visit speculation in the media, no formal agreement was reached regarding Indonesia's reported plan to purchase the BrahMos missile system from India. However, it was announced that discussions on defence industry and supply chain cooperation has been underway and will continue when an Indonesian delegation visits India soon. Despite their converging views on recent geopolitical developments, the joint statement was largely non-committal on their respective worldviews, especially in contrast to Indonesia's comprehensive and far-reaching joint statement with China.

¹² Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "India-Indonesia Joint Statement on the State Visit of H.E. Prabowo Subianto, President of Republic of Indonesia (23-26 January 2025)," January 26, 2025. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documnets>.

¹³ Ibid

The main highlight of Prime Minister Modi's 2018 visit to Indonesia was the agreement to develop the Port of Sabang in the Aceh Province.¹⁴ It was expected that progress on port development would feature in the joint statement during Prabowo's visit. However, the joint statement was silent on this issue.

Regarding maritime delimitation, the two countries are yet to settle the EEZ boundary demarcation. India and Indonesia reached an agreement demarcating the continental shelf between Great Nicobar Island and Sumatra in 1947. Later, in 1977, the revised treaty decided to extend the continental shelf to the Andaman Sea and the Indian Ocean.¹⁵ The joint statement issued at the end of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Indonesia in 2018 raised the maritime delimitation issue, with Jakarta showing interest in signing an agreement that would delimit the EEZ. However, this issue also found no mention in the joint statement.

Conclusion

Since assuming office, President Prabowo has made some changes to Indonesia's long-held ASEAN-centric approach. His inaugural overseas visits, covering China, the US, Peru, Brazil, and the UK shortly after assuming the presidency, highlighted his commitment to engaging with multiple global powers, contrasting with his predecessor Jokowi's more domestically focused agenda. The visits reflect Prabowo's desire to position Indonesia as a proactive player on the international stage.

After a promising start following their independence, relations between India and Indonesia experienced a downturn during the Cold War. It was only in the 1990s that efforts to reconnect began to bear fruit following the initiation of India's 'Look East Policy'. The subsequent launch of the 'Act East Policy' (AEP) in 2014 gave a new thrust to India's approach towards Southeast Asia. A significant milestone was the adoption of the "Shared Vision on Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region" during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2018 visit to Jakarta,¹⁶ which infused fresh momentum in bilateral ties.

¹⁴ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "India-Indonesia Joint Statement During Visit of Prime Minister to Indonesia (May 30, 2018)," n.d. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29932/IndiaIndonesia+Joint+Statement+during+visit+of+Prime+Minister+to+Indonesia+May+30+2018>.

¹⁵ United Nations – Treaty Series. Vol. 1208, June 22, 1978. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201208/volume-1208-I-19476-English.pdf>.

¹⁶ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," n.d. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29933>.

Indonesia joined India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) alongside France, focusing on the Maritime Resources Pillar. Indonesia currently leads the 'Working Group on the Blue Economy' within the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).

Prabowo's state visit to India has enhanced bilateral relations, positioning the two countries as key partners and collaborative regional powers within the Global South.

Indonesia's geostrategic position is indeed advantageous, as it is located at the crossroads of major straits linking the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The fact that the Indian naval ships have been making regular visits to Indonesian ports and the two navies have been conducting coordinated patrols since 2002, points to the promise of closer defence relations. Under Prabowo's leadership, there is potential for a renewed focus on collaboration between India and Indonesia in areas such as defence and maritime security. If Indonesia's procurement of the BrahMos missile system materialises in the future, this will be a major boost for bilateral relations. Several 'Joint Working Groups' have been established in the areas of agriculture, energy, counter-terrorism and defence. It is to be hoped that these mechanisms will transform opportunities for cooperation into concrete programmes.



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