

## Indonesia-Malaysia Relations under President Jokowi Administration

Despite number of domestic political, territorial and economic issues between Malaysia and Indonesia, both Muslim Southeast Asian States have been sharing healthy relationships since decades. Although the problems of migrant workers, illegal fishing, and the historic Ambalat dispute are some serious standing issues between the two neighboring countries, the diplomatic ties are running smoothly (Weatherbee, 2017). During the era of President Jokowi, the commercial, political, economic and cultural ties have been strengthened and both states have achieved new miles of progress and prosperity in various fields. President Jokowi has been serving the Indonesian state since 2014 and is still on the seat, in this period the two Muslim States entered into many new bilateral and multilateral political, social and economic agreements, enhanced the two-side trade, and solved many domestic issues (Lundry, 2018).

### Political Relations

The political relationships between Indonesia and Malaysia are largely defined by the rivalry and long-lasting political issues. In the presidency of Jokowi many political issues were brought to table and few of them were resolved to some extent. But still, the border issues are there, arresting of each other's maritime officers and fishermen is a continuous routine between the two Muslim States (Wang, 2021). In the year 2015, Jokowi visited Malaysia, and agreements with their Malaysian counterpart Abdul Razak paved the way for smooth political relations. During this visit, both state leaders agreed to resolve the Indonesian Migrant worker's issues. Moreover, they have also sealed some prominent trade agreements. Many of the foreign policy analysts were of the view that although Jokowi selected Malaysia for his first visit after coming in power, the epicenter of his policy is dealing native issues instead of foreign and country to country tussles (Sulistiyanto, 2018).

During the political headship of President Jokowi, Indonesia and Malaysia have entered lots of territorial, social and political agreements. But still, there are a lot of issues that are unresolved between the two proximate states. As the two countries shared a common border and most of the land consisted of small and large islands, therefore, the issue of clarification of maritime boundaries is crucial. The two states have a common border of 1881 kilometers along the Strait of Malacca, South China Sea and Celebes. As these areas are replete with natural resources as well as it is an old route for the commercial maritime worldwide transportation. Therefore, the naval boundaries dispute is a kind of serious issue between Malaysia and Indonesia (Connelly, 2015).

### Economic Relations

As Malaysia and Indonesia are proximate states and share common social and economic values. Therefore, the economic ties have remained at their summit. In the year 2020, Malaysian exports to Indonesia were 7.45 billion dollars, whereas, on the other side, in the year 2020, Indonesia has exported goods worth 8.34 billion dollars to Malaysia. The main products were palm oil, coal and stearic acid etc. Further, in the past almost 2 decades of president Jokowi the trade between the two states has increased at the rate of 7.66 percent (Mietzner, 2014).

Moreover, there are several bilateral economic pacts between Malaysia and Indonesia, such as the Pact between Bank Nagra of Malaysia and Financial Service Authority Indonesia and a pact between Indonesia and the Council of Palm Oil Producing Countries. Apart from many other

such bilateral economic and business agreements, these two agreements are signs of good ties between Indonesia and Malaysia (Thies, Cameron & Angguntari, 2018).

Likewise, in the year 2017, both Indonesia and Malaysia have started a framework to use the native currencies for the final settlement of trade obligations along with the cooperation of Thailand. In the same way, in 2017 Indonesia was the 7th largest importer of Malaysian products. Contrarily, in 2017 Malaysia was the 4th largest importer of Indonesian products. Further, in the last few years, Malaysia has had a positive balance of trade with Indonesia which is worth 600 million dollars. It shows there are a wide level of chances of economic ties between the two states (Pratiwi, 2020).

#### Cultural Relations

Malaysia and Indonesia have got independence from almost the same nature of colonial masters i.e., Indonesia from Dutch and Malaysia from the British and also have been sharing common cultural, religious and social values since centuries. Result, both states have a lot of similarities in their culture and there are strong cultural ties at the state as well as individual levels. Oppositely, both states have also entered into many disputes due to the shared cultural heritages. One of the recent episodes of cultural disputes was the recent representing Indonesian traditional dance as Malaysian by a third party erroneously (Gunn, 2014). Furthermore, as currently many of the Indonesian workers and families are working and living in Malaysian culture. Therefore, the occurrence of cultural clashes on either side is a common practice. For the promotion of the tourism industry, the Malaysian government has featured many prominent cultural icons, such as Rasa Sayang song, wayang Kulit as well as Barongan Dance. This results in fury among the Indonesian Nation who believes that these songs and cultural icons belong to their civilization and culture. This results in disputes among the Malaysian and Indonesians either side at the state level as well as individually. The Pendet Controversy was also a cultural dispute between the two states that has disturbed the two sides relations (Downes, 2019).

#### Indonesia-Malaysia Views regarding ASEAN

Malaysia and Indonesia both are the founding members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). By using the platform of ASEAN these two neighboring states have entered into numerous multilateral social, political, economic and cultural agreements. In addition, both states are willing to strengthen the platform of ASEAN for further progress and prosperity. During the era of Jokowi two states have paved a new way for progress and prosperity. Haze is the major environmental issue for the two states. Therefore, to tackle the haze issue, during the Jokowi administration Malaysia and Indonesia have not only taken strict action at the local level but also got the attention of international bodies to make policies for the environmental issues at the international level. But as well as the platform of ASEAN is concerned, the ASEAN Agreement on transboundary haze Pollution has remained ineffective to resolve the issue of haze in both countries to a large extent (Artner, 2017).

#### South China Sea Politics – Malaysia-Indonesia

Jokowi has remained on four main points of foreign policy. First promoting the Indonesian identity as an archipelagic state. Secondly, increasing the international role of middle power diplomacy. Thirdly, enhancing engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. Lastly, change in the foreign ministry to emphasize economic diplomacy. Likewise with regard to the views of Indonesia on South China Sea dispute between the littoral state of South China Sea, the

president Jokowi always rejected the one-sided claims of China over the South China Sea and desired for the international support and cooperation to resolve the long-standing dispute between the bordering states of South China Sea (Connelly, 2016).

At the same time, the Malaysian state administration has always rejected the claims of the Chinese government over the waters and islands in the South China Sea, the ownership of which is also controversial among many Southeast Asian states. In February 2022, Indonesian Maritime Security Agency invited five states, Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam, Singapore and Philippines to give a joint response to China over the South China Sea. Out of these 5 states, 4 states have direct territorial disputes with China. So, it shows that both Malaysia and Indonesia have great concerns over the issue and politics of the South China Sea and the showing of hegemony in the China Sea by the Chinese political administration (Institute of Strategic and International Studies, 2015).

#### Problem of Indonesian Migrant Workers

The Indonesian Migrant workers who are living in Malaysia for livelihood purposes or some other motives, problems of these workers are also a serious kind of issue between Malaysia and Indonesia. In the past 2 decades due to the weak economic performance of Indonesia and poor performance of the industrial sector, a large number of workers have been moved to Malaysia for a better future and to get some work over there. Along this many Indonesians have also reached Malaysia illegally who are also deprived of many legal and social rights in Malaysia. So, these migrant workers are the real issue for the two states. According to an estimation almost 300,000 Indonesian workers are currently residing in Malaysia and supporting their families back in Indonesia by sending them remittances. But in Malaysia these Indonesian migrant workers are facing the issue of extortion, abuse, poverty and human trafficking (Austin, 2017). The president Jokowi has stressed the social and political rights of the Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. During his annual meeting with the Malaysian Prime Minister, Jokowi stressed the welfare projects of Indonesian workers and asked the Malaysian Prime Minister to resolve the issues of workers. Additionally, the majority of the Indonesian workers are working 18 hours a day, 6 days a week and their salary or wages are very low. They are underemployed which is also hitting the percentage of remittances. In the year 2011, both states signed a memorandum of association for the protection and safety of the migrant workers, but still, issues of migrant workers are there which are unresolved (Prusinski, 2016).

#### How to Solve the Issue of Migrant Workers?

Indonesian migrant workers especially in Malaysia and generally all over the world are facing various problems. These problems vary from rape, low pay, malnutrition, and lack of health facilities to cultural issues. The Indonesian Government has taken various steps to counter these migrant issues. The Jokowi administration has developed a system that will monitor the movement of the female migrant workers. In this way, the authorities can easily check the location of women workers at the time of any mishaps. Similarly, the President Jokowi has signed various Memorandums with the Malaysian Prime Minister to protect the social, political and economic rights of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia (Karim, 2017).

#### Coping Terrorism rising from Al-Qaida and ISIS?

In the past few years, terrorist-related activities have been boosted in Malaysia and Indonesia and ISIS, as well as Al-Qaida, has accepted the liability for all such acts of terrorism in the two states. Moreover, in the year 2016, the police and law enforcement agencies in Malaysia have

arrested some 160 people who were allegedly involved in some planned terrorist activities. In counter measures, the Malaysian government has started strict surveillance of educational institutes. Because the majority of recruitment in ISIS was from these educational and religious institutes. Similarly, the Malaysian authorities have also shut down websites that are supporting ISIS and Al-Qaeda (Nasir, 2019).

On the other side, in Indonesia the terrorist activities have taken a new step during the regime of Jokowi. To counter all such activities and mushrooming of terrorists in Indonesia, the authorities have commenced various steps. First of all, the misconception of Jihad (Fight against enemy) is described in detail. The religious cleric's services are used for this purpose. Similarly, the recruitment of youth of Indonesia is also discouraged through different channels. For this purpose, the Indonesian Government has availed the services of media (Habulan, 2018).

#### Conclusion

Indonesia and Malaysia have historic relations. They have a win-win situation in case of good relations, but still, there are territorial and social issues that are hampering the achieving a new step in diplomatic ties. President Jokowi has worked a lot to strengthen the ties with Malaysia which has returned positive feedback. Yet the president Jokowi focuses on domestic reforms and his inexperience in foreign affairs predicts the low performance of the president in the foreign fronts. But on the contrary, apart from many failures, Jokowi has achieved a lot of goals on economic, business, social, and political fronts. The foreign policy of Jokowi with the neighboring states as well as with the international world has provided him chances to rule for a longer period as compared to the other predecessors. Moreover, by using the platform of ASEAN and UN Jokowi has raised the issue of terrorism and migrant workers at regional and international bodies respectively.

#### References:

- Artner, Annamaria. "Role Of Indonesia in The Evolution Of Asean." *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1–38.
- Austin, Mary. "Defending Indonesia's Migrant Domestic Workers." *Citizenship and Democratization in Southeast Asia*, edited by Ward Berenschot et al., Brill, 2017, pp. 265–88.
- Connelly, Aaron L. "Sovereignty and the Sea: President Joko Widodo's Foreign Policy Challenges." *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2015, pp. 1–28.
- Connelly, Aaron L. *Indonesia in the South China Sea: Going It Alone*. Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2016.
- Downes, Meghan. "Indonesia and Its Others: Inclusion, Exclusion and Inter-Cultural Engagements." *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde*, vol. 175, no. 2/3, 2019, pp. 151–53.
- Gunn, Geoffrey C. "Indonesia in 2013: Oligarchs, Political Tribes, and Populists." *Asian Survey*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2014, pp. 47–55.
- Habulan, Angelica, "Southeast Asia: Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Online Extremism." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2018, pp. 7–30.

Institute of Strategic and International Studies. *ISIS Malaysia Annual Report 2015*. Institute of Strategic and International Studies, 2016.

Karim, Moch Faisal. "Institutional Dynamics of Regulatory Actors in the Recruitment of Migrant Workers: The Case of Indonesia." *Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 45, no. 4/5, 2017, pp. 440–64.

Lundry, Chris. "Assessing Indonesia's Foreign Policy under Jokowi." *Asia Policy*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2018, pp. 30–35.

Mietzner, Marcus. "Indonesia in 2014: Jokowi and the Repolarization of Post-Soeharto Politics." *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2015, pp. 119–38.

Nasir, Amalina Abdul. "Women in Terrorism: Evolution from Jemaah Islamiyah to Islamic State in Indonesia and Malaysia." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2019.

Pratiwi, Fadhila Inas, et al. "China Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) in Indonesia's Socio-Economic Security Challenges: A Policy Recommendation." *Sorotan Kebijakan Luar Negeri Indonesia Di Mata Akademisi Muda Indonesia*, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2020, pp. 78–93.

Prusinski, Ellen. "'Because It Is Our Fate': Migration Narratives and Coping Strategies among Indonesian Migrant Women Workers." *Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 44, no. 4/5, 2016, pp. 485–515.

Sulistiyanto, Priyambudi. "Indonesia in 2017: Jokowi's Supremacy and His Next Political Battles." *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2018, pp. 153–66.

Thies, Cameron G., and Angguntari C. Sari. "A Role Theory Approach to Middle Powers: Making Sense of Indonesia's Place in the International System." *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2018, pp. 397–421.

Wang, Seaver. "Is Climate Change a Foreign Policy Issue?" *The New Atlantis*, no. 64, 2021, pp. 56–64.

Weatherbee, Donald E. "Indonesia's Foreign Policy In 2016: Garuda Hovering." *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2017, pp. 163–76.