

4 INDONESIA

Indonesia's geography is an integral part of its history. A sprawling archipelago straddling the equator, Indonesia has more than 13,500 islands, ranging from tiny areas that not so long ago were merely atolls to the huge island of Sumatra. In 2015 it had 260 million people, spread very unevenly across these islands. At the one extreme, over 145 million live on densely populated Java; at the other extreme, the large, resource-rich island of Kalimantan is sparsely populated. Indonesia is a tropical country with a volcanic spine running through its archipelago. Many volcanoes are still active, every so often wreaking destruction on surrounding peoples and crops. But the volcanic soil and the tropical climate have made most of Indonesia extremely fertile, nowhere more so than the river valleys of Java, where prosperous kingdoms have waxed and waned over more than a thousand years.

The Indonesian coat of arms bears the inscription "Unity in Diversity." The diversity of Indonesia is apparent to even the most casual observer. There are over 300 sociolinguistic groups in Indonesia, each with a distinct culture and heritage. Only about one in six Indonesians speaks the national language at home. Even fewer speak Bahasa Indonesia as their first language. The mother tongue of the vast majority is a regional language, for example, Javanese, Balinese, Minangkabau, or Acehnese. Nursery rhymes,

childhood stories, myths, legends, and cultural mores are as diverse as the languages. Not surprisingly, most Indonesians first develop a regional identity, only learning the national language, Bahasa Indonesia, and with it an Indonesian identity, when they begin school. Only in the major cities of Jakarta, Surabaya, Bandung, and Medan are there significant numbers of people who speak Bahasa Indonesia in the home and identify themselves as Indonesians from childhood. The diversity of Indonesia is an enormous challenge to the modern State. Nation-building in Indonesia is no mere slogan, nor is it merely a euphemism for economic development. The Indonesian government is acutely aware that national unity and a national cultural identity have to be created. The regional identity that most Indonesians acquire automatically, together with the country's cultural and linguistic diversity, makes nation-building and the development of social cohesiveness a long-term and difficult task.

PRECOLONIAL INDONESIA

South-East Asia lies astride the great trading routes from China to India. There are records stretching back over 2,000 years of traders sailing their ships between China and South-East Asia and between South-East Asia and India. South-East Asia, and especially the Indonesian archipelago, was a source of spices, gourmet foods, sandalwood, medicines, and other tropical products. Chinese, Arabic, and Indian traders were a common sight in the ports which dotted the archipelago.

There were two broad types of states in the Indonesian archipelago in the premodern period. First were the coastal states. Located at the mouths of rivers with good secure harbours, they were dependent on regional and international trade. The most prominent of these were on or close to the Straits of Melaka, through which shipping between China and India (and later Europe and China) had to pass—on the east and south coast of Sumatra and on the north Java coast. Second were the inland states. The wealth of these states was based on rich agricultural production from the volcanic soils of the alluvial plains. The most prominent of these were in Central and East Java and in Bali.

The earliest kingdoms in the Indonesian archipelago were Hindu/Buddhist states. Hinduism and Buddhism came to South-East Asia from India, spreading along the trade routes and being adopted by local rulers attracted by the Court ritual and religious/philosophical ideas. Today visitors to Indonesia flock to the

central Javanese city of Yogyakarta. Together with its neighbouring city of Solo, Yogyakarta is the heartland of the Javanese, the centre of their history, culture, and philosophy. Within 30 kilometres of Yogyakarta are two great religious monuments: the Buddhist temple of Borobudur and the Hindu temple of Prambanan. Both were built out of local stone between the sixth and eighth centuries, hundreds of years before the medieval cathedrals of Europe even began. Restoration projects have revealed the stunning beauty of the temples, their sheer scale of construction and the intricately carved base-reliefs which adorn them from top to bottom. These are religious monuments, dating from a time when Hinduism and Buddhism were the predominant religions in Java. They are evidence of the prosperity of the kingdoms to which they belonged, the engineering knowledge of their people, their craftsmanship and their artistry. Borobudur and Prambanan temples are the finest in Indonesia, but hundreds of other, smaller temples can be found throughout Java. The Balinese remain predominantly Hindu and there are many thousands of old and new temples in Bali.

Muslim traders are recorded in the Indonesian archipelago as early as the sixth century, but the Islamisation of Indonesia began in the 13th century with the conversion of Indonesia's northern tip of Sumatra. We know little about this early conversion but it is clear that the Islamisation process was very slow, with people absorbing Islamic beliefs into existing religious and philosophical systems as they adapted Islam to Indonesian soil. When the Dutch arrived in Indonesia at the beginning of the 17th century, the kingdoms they engaged with were almost all Islamic, with Hinduism restricted to Bali. But the nature of Indonesian Islam varied greatly, and still does. There is a broad spectrum of practices and intensities of belief, ranging from the Acehnese, who are generally more publicly Islamic and more strict adherents to the principles of the Koran than others in Indonesia, to the people of central and east Java, who have a more relaxed Islamic faith sustained alongside pre-Islamic beliefs and practices.

The inland kingdoms were prosperous agrarian states generating considerable agricultural surpluses. They were strongly hierarchical states, with taxation systems extracting agricultural products and labour from the peasants. They developed legal systems and bureaucratic structures. The agricultural surpluses supported large courts and the skilled workers needed to build the massive stone temples. The courts promoted high cultures of music, dance, philosophy, and literature. The great Indian epic poems, the Mahabharata and the

Ramayana, were adapted by court musicians, dancers, and master puppeteers as vehicles for the transmission of Javanese or Balinese ethics and cultural values. Writing systems were based on Sanskrit, with many Sanskrit words entering local languages.

When the Europeans arrived in South-East Asia in the middle of the 16th century, there were well-established states across the whole of South-East Asia. The early European visitors marvelled at the prosperity of the region, the health of its peoples, and the sophistication of its high cultures. There were longstanding trading networks linking the South-East Asian states and a tradition of shipbuilding and maritime skills which saw traders from South-East Asia ply their wares as far afield as China and India. The major Indonesian states were at Aceh, on the northern tip of Sumatra; in Central Java; in Bali; in the Malukas and Sulawesi; and on the north coast of Java. They competed vigorously, sometimes waging war on each other. There was a constant flow of goods and people across the archipelago, using Malay as the medium of communication.

COLONIALISM

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to acquire outposts in Asia. In the 16th century they established trading posts and colonial outposts in places as disparate as Goa in India, Melaka in Malaysia, Amboin and Timor in Indonesia, and Macau in China. By the beginning of the 17th century the power of Catholic Portugal and Spain was waning in the face of the emerging Protestant nations of England and the Netherlands. The English East India Company and the Netherlands United East India Company (VOC) were established in 1600 and 1602, respectively. For nearly 200 years they were fierce commercial rivals in Asia. The VOC moved quickly to establish trading posts in India, Ceylon, Taiwan, and China, seeking the produce of "the Orient." A major target was the Spice Islands, what is now Sulawesi and Maluku in eastern Indonesia. The VOC first became involved in the Indonesian archipelago through trading with local kingdoms, but its desire to monopolise the spice trade to Europe quickly caused it to expel the Portuguese from Amboin and then to destroy the local kingdoms. In 1619, the VOC launched an attack on Jayakarta, then a major fort and trading town of the West Java kingdom of Banten where the VOC had been trading peacefully for a number of years. The Bantenese were driven out and on the ashes of the razed town the VOC established its headquarters for the archipelago. Jayakarta was renamed Batavia, a name which was retained for the capital

of the Netherlands East Indies until the declaration of independence in August 1945, when it was again renamed, this time as Jakarta.

The VOC slowly extended its physical presence in the Indonesian archipelago. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries it behaved much like a local kingdom, creating and breaking alliances with rival kingdoms to make war on its enemies and trading widely both within the archipelago and with China, India, and Europe. But there were crucial differences which eventually enabled the Dutch to conquer the archipelago. First, the VOC had a power base outside the archipelago, with gunboats and troops stationed throughout Asia which it could use against indigenous rulers. Second, the VOC had a broader strategic framework and, against traditional ruling elites with little experience of the world outside the archipelago, they were able to take advantage of the rivalry between local kingdoms. Third, by the 18th century they had superior weaponry.

Nevertheless, it was not until 1756 that the VOC controlled the whole of Java, when it divided the Mataram Court of Central Java against itself. The VOC went bankrupt in 1796, wracked by corruption. It then controlled Java, Amboin and small nearby islands, and small enclaves in central and southern Sumatra. It was the biggest, most powerful State in the archipelago, but most of what is now Indonesia still lay outside its control. The Netherlands Crown took over the assets of the VOC and, after a brief interlude of British control of Java during the Napoleonic Wars, the East Indies reverted to Dutch rule. Throughout the 19th century, the Netherlands East Indies government gradually extended its control over Sumatra and eastern Indonesia. With the destruction of the Balinese kingdoms in 1905 and the defeat of the powerful kingdom of Aceh in 1911 the colony was complete. The Dutch often talked of their 300 years in the Netherlands East Indies but, for most people in the archipelago, incorporation into the Netherlands East Indies occurred toward the end of the 19th century or in the first decade of the 20th century. Local pride, regional political, cultural and personal loyalties, and a sense of local history remained strong when the Japanese destroyed the Dutch empire in 1941.

By the beginning of the 20th century the Dutch had created the Netherlands East Indies as a centralised state, with power concentrated in the capital, Batavia, an efficient bureaucracy and a police and military service able to maintain social control. After the bitter experience of fighting the fiercely Islamic kingdom of Aceh for over 40 years,

the colonial government maintained a careful watch on Islamic religious leaders. Its policy distinguished between Islam as a religion and Islam as a political force. Religious observance was interfered with as little as possible, though mosques, Islamic schools, and religious teachers were carefully monitored to ensure that they did nothing to rally people against the colonial state. The involvement of Islamic leaders in political activities was carefully monitored and ruthlessly quashed if they appeared to be gathering local support. The Dutch promoted a Western-educated, secular elite built around the children of the precolonial elites and made every effort to prevent the development of a modernised Islamic elite.

The Dutch economic impact on the Indonesian archipelago was enormous. In their successful efforts to control the quantity and prices of the products of the archipelago, they gradually destroyed regional trading networks that had existed for hundreds of years, serviced in large part by indigenous traders who plied the archipelago and sailed as far as India to the east and China to the north. Indigenous traders were henceforth restricted to local trade. External trade became the exclusive preserve of European companies, and interregional trade the preserve of Chinese, who were encouraged to immigrate from southern China.

Javanese agriculture in particular was transformed by the Dutch in the 19th century. They created what they called a "cultivation system," by which Javanese farmers were compelled to produce designated crops for sale to the State at fixed prices. The crops—mainly sugar, indigo, coffee, and tea—were then processed and transported for sale to European markets. By the end of the 19th century, Java was the world's largest sugar producer. Sugar mills were built throughout rural Java to process the raw cane and railways and ports constructed to take the export crops to market. Java, largely a subsistence economy before 1830, was transformed. The subsistence economy gave way to a much more diversified economy: the population steadily grew until, by the end of the 19th century, there was little uncultivated land left, and towns and cities expanded greatly to service the burgeoning export trade. By the beginning of the 20th century, most Javanese no longer owned land, working as tenant farmers, sharecroppers, or wage labourers in the local area and nearby towns.

The economic transformation of Sumatra in the first 30 years of the 20th century was equally dramatic. Huge areas of virgin forest made way for tobacco and rubber plantations. Sumatra became one of

the world's largest and finest suppliers of tobacco and, together with Malaya, its largest supplier of rubber. When oil was discovered in the 1920s, it became the springboard for what was to become the Royal Dutch Shell Oil Company.

Much of the labour which opened up Sumatra was Chinese. Chinese had long been resident in the Indonesian archipelago, predominantly as traders and merchants, and there had been a steady growth in their numbers in the 17th and 18th centuries. The great expansion, however, was part of the wider process of Chinese migration to South-East Asia, Australia, the Pacific, and the United States after the acquisition of Hong Kong by Britain in 1842 and the forced opening of treaty ports on the South China coast. In the Netherlands East Indies, they became not only traders, shopkeepers, and urban workers but labourers on plantations, in tin and coal mines, and on wharves and ships. They were never a large proportion of the colony's population, less than 3 percent, but by the 20th century were dominant in local trade and urban commerce.

The economic transformation of Indonesia led to an accelerating process of urbanisation. By the mid-1910s, the major cities in Java were already unable to cope with the migration from rural areas. The increasingly densely populated poorer parts of the towns and cities had low-quality houses, with no sanitation systems or piped water. They flooded badly during the annual monsoon season, with their people wracked by malaria and waterborne diseases such as cholera and typhoid. The colonial government lacked the political will to tackle these urban problems, which, by the 1920s, were probably beyond its capacity to solve. Living conditions for most urban Indonesians steadily worsened from the 1920s through to the 1970s.

The Dutch introduced Western education in order to provide the skilled labour needed by the expanding colonial economy. Dutch was used as the medium of instruction by the best schools, graduation from which led to the better-paid administrative jobs or the possibility of entering a university in the Netherlands or the medical and law schools in the colony. But entry to these schools was very difficult and, those few on scholarships aside, in practice was restricted to children of the indigenous elites or government officials. It was easier to get a modicum of education in schools where the medium of instruction was the vernacular language. Even so, at the end of the Dutch colonial era, the literacy rate in Indonesia was lower than in that of any other European colony in Asia, with the exception of the Portuguese colony of East Timor.

NATIONALISM

The first people to regard themselves as Indonesian, rather than as Javanese, Acehnese, or a member of one of the other ethnic groups, were young men and women who had received a Western education at local high schools and subsequently at universities in the Netherlands. The term "Indonesia" was first used in the early 1920s, but by 1928 the idea of being Indonesian and the determination to create a modern Indonesian nation free from Dutch colonial rule was widely held. In that year, a national Youth Congress was held in Batavia, at which thousands of emotionally aroused youths witnessed the ceremonial raising of the red and white flag, recited a National Pledge, and sang a newly composed national song. This was a public expression of their determination to create an independent Indonesia, with a common flag, language (Bahasa Indonesia, which was derived from Malay), and national identity which transcended regional and ethnic loyalties.

The first stirrings of nationalism in the 1910s were seen by the Dutch colonial government as potentially dangerous but not an immediate threat. As political parties enrolled thousands of members and as newspapers and propaganda handbills were widely distributed, the colonial laws were made more restrictive and political activists repeatedly jailed or exiled from the colony. The Dutch could never understand the intensity of nationalist feelings and had no plans for the colony's political development beyond vague references to the possibility of self-government eventually.

The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) tried a revolutionary path to independence in badly planned uprisings in November 1926 and January 1927. The only result was that thousands of Indonesians, many of whom had only a marginal connection with the PKI, were either jailed or exiled to a political prison on the malaria-infested upper reaches of the Digul River, in what is now West Irian. There they stayed until taken to Australian jails in 1942 in the wake of the Japanese occupation of Indonesia. Ironically, they did not remain in jail long once Australian trade unionists realised that they were political prisoners. Many of them became leaders of a campaign to support Indonesian independence in 1945 and 1946. This resulted in Australian trade unions blacklisting Dutch shipping and in the Australian government giving diplomatic support of the Indonesian Republic against the Dutch.

The most prominent Indonesian nationalist from the mid-1920s was a young engineering graduate named Sukarno. Before he was exiled in February 1934, Sukarno laid the basis for his dominant

political position after 1945 as President of Indonesia. Sukarno alternately charmed and irritated his fellow nationalists, but even his strongest opponents admired the brilliance of his oratory. Wherever he went, he drew large and enthusiastic crowds to his political rallies in both large cities and small towns.

More than any other person, Sukarno succeeded in spreading the simple message of freedom to a wider cross-section of urban and rural Indonesians than ever before. He popularised the nationalist ideology—the simple idea that his people were Indonesians and must set aside their religious and ethnic differences to unite in opposition to colonial rule. Although he was exiled in 1934, his memory lingered on in the minds of ordinary Indonesians who had heard him speak or been charmed by his charismatic personality or had simply heard of his heroic qualities from others.

Two major issues were not resolved by the colonial nationalist movement but became major issues in Indonesian politics in the 1950s and 1960s. First there was the question of the role of Islam in Indonesia. The mainstream of the nationalist movement in the 1920s and 1930s was in agreement that an independent Indonesia should be a secular state. This position was adopted partly because of the religious diversity of Indonesia: although Muslims were in an overwhelming majority, only a minority of these were strict adherents to Islamic teachings and precepts. A secular state was seen as a way of avoiding conflict. Some Islamic political parties disagreed and, after independence, strengthened their demands for national laws to be based on Islamic teaching. In Indonesia today this is still one of the most sensitive issues.

A second major unresolved issue was whether Indonesia needed a social and economic revolution, or whether political independence was a sufficient goal. The advocates of major social and economic reforms were in a minority in the 1920s and 1930s. The dominant view was that Indonesians should concentrate on achieving independence and concern themselves with these potentially divisive issues after this was achieved. Those who wanted more fundamental social and economic reforms revived their activities in the 1950s. Their criticism was then directed at an Indonesian government in the hands of those who had led the nationalist movement since the late 1920s.

THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

The Japanese occupied Indonesia in March 1942, with little resistance from the Dutch. Initially, they were welcomed by many Indonesians,

who were glad to be freed from Dutch rule and impressed by Japanese propaganda slogans such as “Japan the Light of Asia” and the “East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere.” However, it did not take very long for the Japanese to alienate themselves from all levels of Indonesian society. The *romusha* programme on Java, whereby all able-bodied males were required to provide free labour for the war effort, affected almost every family. Most *romusha* labour was used within the colony, on projects such as building railway lines and ships and on infrastructure construction. But hundreds of thousands were sent overseas to work on the construction of the Thai–Burma railway and Japanese projects elsewhere in South-East Asia. Rice production on Java fell, through Japanese mismanagement as much as any other cause, and food and clothing were soon in desperately short supply. Indonesians quickly learnt that despite Japanese propaganda stressing Asian solidarity against Europeans, they were treated as distinctly inferior people by the Japanese.

However, Japanese occupation policies had some long-term benefits for Indonesia. First, in removing the Dutch from administrative functions the Japanese elevated Indonesians to positions they would not have been able to obtain under colonial rule. This administrative experience proved useful after 1945. Second, they prohibited the use of Dutch and, while promoting Japanese, were pragmatic enough to realise that few Indonesians would be able to master that language quickly. They therefore promoted the use of Indonesian in schools and in government administration. This proved to be of help to the infant Republic of Indonesia after 1945. Third, they mobilized young Indonesians to support the Japanese war effort. Various schemes were created to provide military training for young people. This military training proved invaluable when Indonesia had to confront the reoccupying Dutch forces between 1946 and 1949. Fourth, they freed nationalist leaders from jail, including Sukarno, on the condition that they supported the war effort. Sukarno and other nationalists used every opportunity to nurture a sense of being Indonesian, using all the propaganda tools placed at their disposal by the Japanese.

By the end of 1944 it was clear to the Japanese that they were losing the Pacific War. As a consequence, they determined to make it as difficult as possible for the Western powers to reoccupy their former colonies. In Indonesia, they began to promote moves toward independence, encouraging nationalists to work out a desirable constitutional framework. Some Indonesians were alarmed at the prospect of obtaining independence courtesy of the Japanese, believing that