

Indonesia Independence Day Special

Unity on pandemic offers springboard for recovery

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The world as we know it has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, more than 170 countries experienced negative per capita income growth. The global economic outlook turned bleak in what the International Monetary Fund called as a crisis like no other. The pandemic has exposed the complex global interdependencies that underpin our economies and highlighted the vulnerability of global value chains.

However, with vaccines already available and several efforts underway through both multilateral and bilateral cooperation frameworks to produce and distribute them more quickly, we can now see the light at the end of the tunnel. After a turbulent year with COVID-19, many experts believe 2021 will be "a year of recovery." According to the IMF, global growth is projected to hit 6.0% this year and moderate to 4.4% in 2022. Most scenarios see the global economy recovering slowly, with emerging markets and

developing economies becoming the engines of growth.

While we continue to receive encouraging news about the vaccines, we should not be complacent as there has been an alarming surge in outbreaks with the spread of new COVID-19 variants. The IMF's positive economic outlook will thus depend on how countries deal with the challenges to public health and economic factors that are inherently difficult to predict. In this regard, there are at least three important ways that Indonesia and Japan, in particular, can navigate this pandemic with success.

First, stronger cooperation among countries remains critical, especially in ensuring fair distribution and equal access to vaccines. All countries must unite against hoarding and nationalism as no one is safe until everyone is. I'm pleased that during this time of difficulties, Indonesia and Japan recently concluded vaccine-sharing arrangements in which we welcomed the donation of 2.16 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine from Japan.

I believe there remains ample room for greater bilateral cooperation in mitigating COVID-19, including through effective implementation of the memorandum of cooperation on health signed in October 2020, which includes, inter alia, the construction of cold chain facilities,



Above: Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia Mahendra Siregar speaks during an online ceremony to mark the arrival of 2.16 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine made in Japan. Left: Indonesian President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo (second from right) welcomes Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and his wife, Mariko, to the Presidential Palace in Bogor, West Java, on Oct. 20. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA; INDONESIAN PRESIDENTIAL PALACE

stronger partnerships between the pharmaceutical industries of both countries, and the strengthening of capacity and support for establishing sound health governance to deal with future health challenges.

Second, Indonesia and Japan must step up efforts toward economic recovery. To achieve this, Indonesia and Japan must overcome any trade barriers and facilitate greater market access to both countries' potential export commodities. In this regard, Indonesia is committed to ensuring the early conclusion of the general review of the Indonesia-Japan economic partnership agreement by the end of the year to further boost bilateral trade volume.

A stronger investment partnership is

also needed to accelerate the economic recovery program. In light of this, the Indonesian government remains committed to pushing forward with priority infrastructure projects, including the second phase of Jakarta Mass Rapid Transit, Patimban Seaport and North Java Railways. Indonesia and Japan are also exploring other areas for potential investment cooperation, including the fisheries port project in Ambon and the development of Indonesia's outer islands.

Lastly, if there is a silver lining to the pandemic, it's that digital transformation has been accelerated. In a time of social distancing and quarantines, the McKinsey Global Institute has reported that digital adoption has taken a quantum leap at both the organizational and

industrial levels. Digitalization is keeping society and business afloat during the pandemic through remote-work policies and a surge in digital consumption and services.

In this regard, Indonesia and Japan must work together to reap the full economic potential of this growth in digital innovation and creativity by ensuring an ecosystem that enables creative businesses to boost productivity and thrive.

That ecosystem should be based on a sharing economy, stronger innovation, workforce digitalization and financial inclusion. These areas are believed to be crucial elements in realizing the recovery from COVID-19 and reducing inequality, as well as strengthening Indonesia's competitiveness. The embassy in this vein,

considers it important to play an active role in animating the creative segment of the economy to achieve global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

I believe that the long-standing Indonesia-Japan partnership will continue to prosper, and will not be shaken in any way by the COVID-19 pandemic. The successful summit between Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo on Oct. 20, 2020, and the "2+2" defense and foreign ministers meeting on March 30 both reaffirmed and solidified that commitment to further strengthen the strategic partnership.

Let us work closely, hand in hand, to resolve our future challenges. Let us recover together, recover stronger.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.



A shipment of 2.16 million doses of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine from Japan arrives in July. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA

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