

INDIAN COMMUNITY

Indian citizens feel at home in Surabaya

Wahyoe Boediwardhana

THE JAKARTA POST / SURABAYA, EAST JAVA

Sanyog Srivastava, a 49-year-old Indian citizen who currently resides in the city of Surabaya, East Java, is confident enough to guarantee that almost all Indians living in Indonesia would echo his sentiments about the country.

Indonesians are very courteous toward foreigners, demonstrated by smiling faces, high sense of solidarity, easy willingness to help other people and the attitude of respecting others coming from different cultural backgrounds, according to S. Srivastava.

"I feel like living in my own home country. This is funny because when I first came here 19 years ago, I didn't even have any idea where a country called Indonesia was located. Back then, I only knew about Bali," S. Srivastava told *The Jakarta Post* recently in an interview in his workplace in Surabaya.

Similar views on Indonesian people and culture are also shared by Ashish Kumar Srivastava, a citizen hailing from the Kanpur city, Uttar Pradesh province in the



JP/ Wahyoe Boediwardhana

Sanyog Srivastava

northern part of India, who has been living in Surabaya for the last 12 years.

"I really like Surabaya. I have visited 18 countries across the world so far, and this is my favorite city. The residents are very friendly and are eager to lend their hands to help others," A.K. Srivastava said.

The Indian, who came to Indonesia in 2004, now works as the engineering manager of PT Jindal Stainless Indonesia. His second daughter was born in the city.

According to S. Srivastava, a native resident of the Bhopal city in the Madhya Pradesh province of India, there are around 100 family heads or around 300 Indians currently living in Surabaya, most of whom still retain their Indian citizenship. They are affiliated with the India Association of

Surabaya.

Aside from working as textile and sports equipment traders, the majority of Indians who live in Surabaya also work in the mining, metal industry as well as finance sectors.

Once in every two or three months, the Indian residents conduct regular gatherings in previously arranged venues, be they local hotels, clubhouses or Indian restaurants scattered around the city.

Their favorite culinary hotspots include the Sitara India cuisine in Jl. Hayam Wuruk street, the Golden Saffron restaurant in the Bukit Darmo Boulevard area. The Sitara restaurant is often cited as the center of information regarding the activities of the India community in Surabaya.

"When Indians arrive in Surabaya for the first time, they will immediately look for Indian restaurants where they can eat. The restaurants become the spots where the Indians could connect with their fellows who have stayed there longer," S. Srivastava said.

S. Srivastava cited the absence of reliable documents on which they can trace the period when their ancestors from India came to Surabaya for the first time. He, however, was very sure that the Indians came to Indonesia for the first time in the 19th century, with the arrival of their first settlers in Medan, North Sumatra.

"The Indians came to Indonesia mainly to become traders, particularly to trade textiles, machines, clothes, metals to sports equipment," he said.

The man, who currently serves as the president of the India Association Surabaya from 2008 to 2016, estimated that there currently are two to three generations of Indians in Surabaya who had settled there since they first set foot in the city. "Most of them have become Indonesian citizens," he noted.

Those who have become Indonesian citizens have their own



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Indians living in Surabaya pose for a photograph.

associations and keep communication lines open among one another through mailing lists as well as WhatsApp messenger chat groups. "So far, however, they do not have their own media outlets, like magazines or bulletins, yet," he pointed out.

"When we are about to celebrate big religious holidays like *deepavali* or *holi*, we will gather in a large space. There are only about 100 of us, so we also take other people along to celebrate with us," said S. Srivastava, who currently works as engineering expert in PT Gunawan Dianjaya Steel Tbk.

Meanwhile, both men find no difficulties in accessing formal education for their children in Indonesia. A.K. Srivastava and his wife have chosen to send their children to the India Interaction School in Surabaya, while S. Srivastava chose to send his children to the city's public schools.

"My children are even more fluent in speaking Javanese than myself, because every day they interacted with native Indonesian students from their generation [when they were still in school]. Now they have gone to Indian

universities, going to engineering and medical schools," S. Srivastava said.

Both S. Srivastava and A.K. Srivastava are of the view that Indians who live in Surabaya assimilate easily to Indonesian culture thanks to similarities shared by both cultures, particularly in terms of religious affiliation. The Indian Muslims, for instance, partake in observing Ramadhan as well as celebrating Idul Fitri by visiting one another's house to ask for forgiveness.

"Similar to India, where 150 million of them subscribe to Islam," S. Srivastava said.

Through the cultural mission regularly organized by the Indian Embassy in Jakarta, members of the India Association of Surabaya can take an active part in building mutual understanding between the community and Indonesians.

Indian cultural ambassadors who come to Indonesia are sure to traverse big cities like Jakarta, Medan in North Sumatra, Bandung in West Java as well as Surabaya. In order to make the events successful, the association is assisted by the city's tourism and cultural agency.

"We are helped by [Surabaya Mayor] Tri Rismaharini in order to book venues to stage Indian cultural performances, be they films or dances," A.K. Srivastava said.

Indian culture is introduced to Surabaya residents through food festivals, where Indians from the country's northern, central and southern areas gather and introduce the art of their original foods to visitors. In return, they also encourage Surabaya residents to introduce their signature local foods.

The socio-cultural interaction between Indians and Indonesians is so smooth that the former often bring their family members along to come and visit Indonesia.

"My family members asked me not to come home to India yet, since I already feel comfortable to work and live here. My big family is very happy with Surabaya and its residents," A.K. Srivastava said.

S. Srivastava and his wife, meanwhile, have yet to decide whether they will spend their old days in Indonesia or India.

"I would like to spend my old days near my children, so I'll leave it up to them to decide," he said.



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Accompanied by gamelan music, two Indian dancers entertain the audience in Surabaya.



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CPO, coal dominate RI exports to India

Hendarsyah Tarmizi

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Crude Palm Oil (CPO) and steam coal have for years dominated Indonesia's exports and have become the main drivers of the country's trade with India, one of its main trading partners.

Thanks to the significant CPO and coal exports, Indonesia has enjoyed a significant surplus of between \$8 billion and \$9 billion a year from its trade with India during the past five years.

Indonesia, the world's largest CPO producer, exports most of its palm oil production and its derivatives, which total about 30 million tons a year, to India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt and several European countries.

The growing demand for edible oils in the world has led to a sharp increase in demand for Indonesia's CPO. Besides being cheaper than other edible oils, CPO and its derivatives can also be used for other purposes such as for the production of cosmetics and as a blend for bio fuel production.

During 2016, Indonesia exported about 25.7 million tons of CPO, down about 2 percent from the figure in the previous year. The CPO exports account for more than 85 percent of the country's total production, which mostly come from oil palm plantations in Sumatra, Kalimantan and Sulawesi.

The foreign exchange received by Indonesia from all CPO exports last year reached US\$17.8 billion (Rp 240 trillion), an increase of about 8 percent from about \$16.5 billion in 2015, according to data provided by the Indonesian Oil Palm Estate Fund (BPPD).

India, the world's biggest importer of edible oils, is the largest buyer of the country's CPO with total purchases of about 5.1 million tons as of November, last year, far higher than those bought by other countries. For a comparison, China, the second largest buyer, imported about 2.8 million tons of CPO from Indonesia in the same period. Other major buyers such as the Netherlands and Pakistan respectively imported about 1.5 million tons and 1.8 million tons

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India had become the largest buyer of Indonesia's CPO for years now.

during the January-November period, last year.

Based on free-on-board (FOB) prices, Indonesia earned \$3.2 billion from its CPO exports to India, \$1.8 billion from China, \$1.2 billion from Pakistan and \$1 billion from the Netherlands.

Indonesian Palm Oil Producers Association (GAPKI) chairman Joko Supriyono said India had become the largest buyer of Indonesia's CPO for years now. He estimated that the country would maintain its dominance for a long time into the future.

With its large population and the increasing income of its people in rural areas, the demand for edible oils will further increase. Joko said with the current low per capita consumption of edible oils, the cooking oil market in the country was still growing.

"Moreover, unlike buyers in European countries and the United States, the Indian people don't bother about environmental standards imposed on CPO products," he told Antara news agency when he attended a trade expo in New Delhi late last year.

India's palm oil imports are estimated to increase by about 9 percent to 9.24 million tons in the 2016/17 fiscal year, which ends in March, as increases in population and income levels would further drive edible oil consumption.

Besides Indonesia, India also imports CPO from Malaysia, the second largest CPO producer. India also imports soy oil from Brazil and Argentina. It also imports small amounts of sunflower and canola oil.

"Per capita consumption [of

edible oils] has been rising due to the growth of population and rising income levels," the managing director of trading firm G.G. Patel & Nikhi Research Company, Govindbhai Patel, said in an article posted in Hellenic Shipping's news portal hellenicshippingnews.com.

India's edible oil consumption was estimated to increase by 6.25 percent to 22.1 million tons up until October 2017, Patel said. The increase in demand will drive India's annual edible oil imports by 6.2 percent to a record 15.5 million tons this financial year.

Like palm oil, coal also plays a significant role in Indonesia's trade relations with India, which has become one of the largest buyers of the commodity for decades. However, like other buyers such as China, India has begun to reduce its coal imports from Indonesia.

Indonesia produced 461 million tons of coal in 2015 and of the total, about 366 million tons were exported. Unlike palm oil, coal has a gloomier prospect in the Indian market due to a change in its energy policy.

The Indian government has asked local state-owned power plants to stop their coal imports beginning this year, and switch to local coal to operate their power plants. Local coal miners have also been encouraged to increase their production to support the new policy.

India is expected to import around 160.16 million tons of coal in the remainder of the current fiscal year, down 20 percent year-on-year, according to Platts Coal Trader International's report.

Demand for coal in the current fiscal year is estimated at 884.87 million tons, while domestic production is expected to reach 724.71 million tons.

India's coal imports totaled 82.57 million tons during the first five months last year, a 5.4 percent decline over the same period last year, according to vessel-tracking data compiled by Thomson Reuters. According to the data, Indonesia remained the largest supplier with 36.72 million tons, nearly a 20 percent drop from 46.9 million tons shipped in the first five months of 2015.