



Indonesia

News and Views

DOMESTIC ISSUES

Political Issues

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National Agency for
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Bintan Resorts is less than an hour's of catamaran ride away from Singapore. The resort-destination spreads across the northern shores of Bintan and faces the South China Sea, and comprises a good range of beach resorts and hotels to suit the budgets and needs of all holiday-makers. At Bintan Resorts, nature lovers are in for a real treat, where visitors can pay visit to Tanjung Uban, Trikora Beach and some traditional fishing villages such as Berakit, Sebung Perih and Busung.

In the year 2003 Bintan Resorts had received a Pacific Asia Travel Association Gold Award for Eco Tourism related to range of products.

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DOMESTIC ISSUES

Political Issues

Philippine President Awards Prestigious Star to Indonesian Foreign Minister

Jakarta - Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo awarded the prestigious 'Order of Sikatuna' star to Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda.

"Minister Hassan Wirajuda received the star for his contribution to bridging and promoting peace in South Phillipines with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1993 to 1996," spokesman of the Foreign Ministry, Kristiarto Soeryo Legowo told Antara here on Wednesday (28/5).

The Indonesian government in mid-1990 was actively involved in settling the conflict between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front in South Philippines.

Indonesia along with the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) effectively acted as mediator to put an end to the two-decade separatist conflict in the South Phillipines.

On May 26-28, 2008 the government of Philippines, MNLF and OIC held a tripartite meeting in Manila in a bid to restore peace, security and stability in Mindanao, the South Philippines.

In the meantime, earlier this week the Philippine Government decided to free Nur Misuari, MNLF Chairman, on bail after several years of imprisonment.

The decision to free Nur Misuari was hailed by the OIC calling on both parties to continue the implementation of the 1996 peace agreement, meet their obligation and commitment set forth in the historic deal.(ANTARA)

RI Hosts Interfaith Dialog in New York

New York - Indonesia's representative office in New York hosted an interfaith dialog on Wednesday (14/5) as an effort to reemphasize the importance of religious harmony and tolerance in the international community.

Representatives of six major religions - Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism attended the dialog which was directed by Syamsi Ali, an Indonesian Muslim figure in New York.

The speakers at the dialog were figures from various religious communities in New York, namely Daisy Khan of the American Society for Muslim Advancement, Judaist priest Delphine Horvilleur of the New York Central Synagogue, Rev NJ L'Heureux Jr of the Queens Federation of Churches, Dr Uma Mysorekar of the Hindu Temple Society of North America, Venerable Kondanna of the Buddhist Council of New York, and John Kung of the Confucinist Society of New York.

Syamsi Ali said Delphine Horvilleur's presence at the dialog on Wednesday was special because, unlike Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, Judaism had no followers in Indonesia.

Indonesian Consul General in New York Trie Edi Mulyani said the interfaith dialog was intended to build mutual understanding among the different religious communities in New York.

"This interfaith dialog in my view is a means to develop mutual understanding among the different religious communities in New York," she said, adding promoting inter-faith tolerance and understanding was a top priority in the agenda of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's administration in Indonesia.(ANTARA)

FM Hassan Wirajuda Signs Agreements with Baku and Tashkent to Boost Ties

Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda last week (May 10-16) visited Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to strengthen Indonesia's relations with these three countries and sign various agreements.

During his two-day stay in Baku, Hassan Wirayuda met with Azerbaijan's leaders, including President Ilham Aliyev, Prime Minister Artur Rasi-zade, Parliament Speaker Ogtay Asadov and Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov, to discuss bilateral and multilateral issues.

"Both countries' foreign ministers signed the agreement on economic and technical cooperation between the two countries. They also signed another agreement on visa exemptions for diplomatic and service/official passport holders," Azerbaijan Embassy's second secretary for press affairs, Narmina Aslanova, told *The Jakarta Post* last week.

Minister Hassan Wirayuda, Narmina said, attended the opening ceremony of a business forum in Baku. A group of Indonesian businesspeople accompanied Hassan during his trip to the three countries.

The Azerbaijan Embassy also said in a press release that Hassan Wirayuda visited the tomb of Azerbaijan's first president, Heydar Aliyev, at the Alley of Honors and the Alley of Martyrs.

The oil-rich Azerbaijan opened its embassy in Jakarta in 2005. Since then trade between Indonesia and Azerbaijan has grown at a fast rate. In 2007, bilateral trade reached a record high of US\$396.3 million, thanks to Indonesia's purchase of Azerbaijan oil and gas products.

From Baku, Hassan Wirayuda continued his journey to Uzbekistan, a rising star in Central Asia. In Tashkent, Hassan met with Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov. "We consider your visit as another manifestation of mutual interest in developing cooperation," Karimov said while welcoming Hassan, according to UzA news agency.

Hassan Wirayuda also met Speaker of the Legislative Chamber of Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan Dilorom Tashmuhamedova and Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov. During his meetings with Uzbek leaders, the Uzbekistan Embassy in Jakarta said, Hassan discussed "issues of strengthening cooperation between Uzbekistan and Indonesia in all fields".

"The two governments signed memoranda of understanding to establish a joint commission for bilateral cooperation, and between the University of World Economy and Diplomacy of the Foreign Ministry of Uzbekistan and ... Indonesia on cooperation in education and skills development in the diplomatic sphere," the Uzbekistan Embassy said in a statement sent to the *Post*. Hassan and his delegation visited Hazrati Imam complex in Tashkent.

Trade between Uzbekistan, a major cotton producer, and Indonesia in 2007 soared by 168 percent from 2006 to \$28 million.

The Indonesian delegation also visited Kazakhstan and discussed various issues of mutual interest with the country's leaders. (The Jakarta Post)

Europe Admires Democratic Dynamism in Indonesia

Jakarta - House Speaker Agung Laksono said Hungarian President Laszlo Solyom was one of the European

leaders who admired the democratic dynamism in Indonesia.

Agung made the remark after receiving the Hungarian president at the House of Representatives (DPR) building here Wednesday (21/5).

In addition to his effort to enhance the bilateral economic relations between the two countries, the Hungarian President visited Indonesia also to observe and study the democratic life in the world's largest archipelagic country.

"Hungary admires Indonesia's vast territory, its huge population, and democratic life, which has been in discourse among European countries now," Agung said.

According to the House speaker, Hungary is a good European partner to Indonesia.

"Hungary is one of the developed European countries and a producer of various industrial machines including a reliable military industry. Cooperation with the country (Hungary) is very strategic," he said.

However, Agung said, the two countries' lucrative markets have yet to develop further. "Whereas, the bilateral economic relations are very promising as both Indonesia and Hungary have a large population.

Slow process

Agung said Indonesia-Hungary economic ties should be enhanced further as the activities in their relations are still running slowly.

He said the Hungarian president also shared Agung's thoughts. "The two countries have established relations in 1950 but they are developing slowly," he said, adding that the bilateral relations have yet to benefit both Indonesia and Hungary better.

Due to such a condition, Hungary wished to step up cooperation with Indonesia, he said. Agung said Indonesia was expected to increase its

exports of palm oil, food and plastics to Hungary.(ANTARA)

Economic Issues

President: Investment Must Not Harm Nation's Long-Term Interests

Jakarta - President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said investment in Indonesia should not merely prioritize short-term interests that could harm the nation's long-term interests.

Investment should be managed wisely and must not harm the future, President Yudhoyono said in his opening address at the Indonesian Regional Investment Forum (IRIF) 2008 here on Monday (26/5).

"I suggest that we use this opportunity to find a way of wise investment. How to invest in the best way so that our grandchildren will not regret our decisions," he said.

Investment must not harm and compromise the future of Planet Earth just to make profits, he said.

He also suggested to the forum's participants to make the meeting a green forum amid the food crisis and skyrocketing energy prices in world markets.

In the IRIF 2008 organized by Global Initiative and initiated by the Regional Representatives Council (DPD), the Indonesian government was offering 200 projects worth a total of almost US\$19 billion to potential investors.

The figure was double the value of projects offered by the government in the 2006 forum.

The Head of State said cooperation between regional administrations and investors was important to implement pro-growth policies, create job opportunities and reduce poverty.

The current global food crisis had opened opportunities for investors to do businesses in the food sector because

Indonesia was blessed with a vast territory consisting of fertile land.

By applying appropriate policies, technologies and investment, as well as establishing good cooperation, Indonesia could in the medium term become a major food producer in the world, he said.

He also reminded investors not to ignore their social responsibilities toward the local people, and to meet the local markets' demand.

The President also asked investors to carry out training programs for local workers.

IRIF 2008 was being attended by around 1,000 participants including former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the chief commissioner of Malaysia's Sima Darby, Tun Musa Hitam, and the CEO of Malaysia's Khazanah Nasional, Dato Azman.

Among Indonesian government officials scheduled to speak at the forum were Trade Minister Mari Pangestu, Finance Minister Sri Mulyani and State Enterprises Minister Sofyan Djalil.

The 200 projects being offered by the Indonesian government were among other things in the agribusiness, plantation, biofuel, infrastructure, oil and gas, mining, energy, property and tourism sectors.

In the agribusiness sector, the government was offering 40 projects such as a fish processing industry in West Sumatra, and 10 plantations in West Java.

The projects in the infrastructure sector included construction of an oil refinery worth US\$4 billion in Bojonegara, Penajam bridge in Balikpapan (East Kalimantan), Cilegon-Bojonegoro toll road, Kaliwungu seaport in Kendal, Maloy seaport and Sangkimah airport in East Kutai (East Kalimantan). (ANTARA)

Present Atmosphere in RI Conducive for Tourism: Minister

Jakarta - Tourism and Culture Minister Jero Wacik said the current conducive atmosphere in the country must be maintained for the success of Visit Indonesia Year 2008 program.

The number of foreign tourists visiting Indonesia was not affected by the widespread demonstrations against the fuel oil price hikes nor by the increasing political temperature ahead of the 2009 general elections, Minister Wacik said here after attending the opening of an exhibition themed "Reflection on A Century of National Awakening - Developing Culture and the Nation," at the National Awakening Museum, here on Tuesday (20/5).

"Foreigners are now even saying Indonesia is an interesting country," the minister said.

The current situation must be maintained so that conditions in Indonesia remained conducive for the visit Indonesia Year 2008, he said.

Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics had shown that the number of foreign tourists visiting the country this year was up by 15 percent from last year.

"In January, February, March and April this year, the numbers of foreign tourists increased by an average of 15 percent compared with the figures in the same months last year," he said.

Last year, a total of 5.5 million foreign tourists visited the country, and this year Indonesia hopes to attract seven million foreign visitors.

The minister was optimistic this year's target could be achieved given the increased number of foreign tourists in the first four months of this year.

As part of the country's tourism promotion, Indonesia would organize 100 events to commemorate the 100th anniversary of National Awakening, he said.(ANTARA)

Security Climate in Indonesia No Longer Warrants Travel Warning: U.S. Embassy

Jakarta - The U.S. Department of State has lifted its Travel Warning for Indonesia after determining the security climate in the country no longer warrants such a warning, according to information on the website of the US embassy in Jakarta.

U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia Cameron R. Hume on Monday announced that, effective May 23, the Department has canceled the Travel Warning, which has been in effect since November 2000, after a series of bombings struck Jakarta and later Bali.

The U.S. has lifted the warning due to objective improvements made by Indonesia in its current security situation, the Ambassador said.

Indonesia has not experienced a major terrorist attack since October 2005, and the Government of Indonesia has disrupted, arrested and prosecuted numerous terrorist elements.

The Ambassador called the decision significant and said he hoped it would lead to more people-to-people ties between the two countries. He said he expected that more American businesspersons, tourists and scholars would now visit Indonesia to help expand trade, tourism and educational exchange between the two countries.

The Ambassador emphasized that the U.S. remains committed to protecting U.S. citizens and improving security cooperation with Indonesia. He said the Embassy will not modify security precautions in light of this development and urged public facilities in Indonesia to maintain their current high level of security since security threats continue to exist.

The Embassy advises that for updated information on safety and security in Indonesia American citizens and travelers should read the Department Country Specific

Information for Indonesia and the current Worldwide Caution. Both documents are available on the Bureau of Consular Affairs website, <http://travel.state.gov>. (ANTARA)

Number of European Tourist Arrivals in Bali Up 27 Pct

Denpasar - The number of European tourists who visited Bali in the first quarter of 2008 was recorded at 152,005 or an increase by 27 percent from 119,485 in the same period last year.

The number of European tourists who flew directly to Bali Island was also up from 39,993 in March to 42,035 in April 2008, according to data of the Bali tourism service here on Saturday (24/5). Some 22,766 British tourists visited Bali during this year's first quarter, up from 18,420 in the same period last year. From January to April 2008, some 22,566 German tourists arrived in Bali, an increase from 17,671 in the same period last year.

Bali also received 20,022 French tourists in 2008's first quarter, up from 15,665 in the same period last year. (ANTARA)

Boediono Inaugurated as BI Governor

Former coordinating minister for the economy Boediono was inaugurated Thursday (22/5) as Bank Indonesia (BI) governor, stepping into the position amid rising inflation and a planned increase in fuel prices.

Boediono replaces Burhanuddin Abdullah, who was briefly released from detention to take part in the inauguration. Burhanuddin has been charged by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) with the

misappropriation of Bank Indonesia funds.

"I will focus on internal consolidation to prevent such an act from happening again," Boediono told reporters, referring to Burhanuddin's case.

Of the pending fuel prices increase, he said: "Bank Indonesia (BI) will be ready to minimize the impact ... through its monetary policy."

The government plans to raise fuel prices by an average 28.7 percent. The per-liter price of Premium gasoline will increase from Rp 4,500 (48 U.S. cents) to Rp 6,000, diesel from Rp 4,300 to Rp 5,500 and kerosene from Rp 2,000 to Rp 2,500.

BI Deputy Governor Hartadi A. Sarwono said that with the prices increase, full-year inflation would likely reach 12 percent and BI could possibly raise its benchmark interest rate again. Last month, BI raised its rate for the first time in more than two years, up 25 basis points from 8 percent, amid rising inflation due partially to surging food prices.

Year-on-year inflation reached 8.96 percent in April. The Finance Ministry estimated inflation would likely rise to 11.96 percent in the month the government raises fuel prices and lower to 11.2 percent by the end of 2008.

BI Senior Deputy Governor Miranda S. Goeltom said Boediono's experience would help BI's credibility. State Secretary Hatta Radjasa said President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono would announce early next week a replacement for Boediono in the Cabinet. (The Jakarta Post)

Socio - Cultural Issues

Two Hercules Planes to Carry RI Aid for Quake Victims in China

Jakarta - The Indonesian Air Force has made two C-130 Hercules cargo aircraft available to transport Indonesian relief aid to China for victims of the recent earthquake in that country, a spokesman said.

"We have four Hercules cargo planes to support humanitarian operations in and outside the country. To carry humanitarian assistance to China, we are preparing two of the aircraft," Air Commodore Chaeruddin Ray, head of the Indonesian Air Force's information service, told Antara here Monday (19/5).

Separately, the head of the health ministry's crisis management center, Rustam S. Pakaya, said Indonesia is to send a 62-member medical and military team to help quake victims in Shincuan province, China.

The Indonesian team would consist of health ministry, National Defense Forces (TNI) and police officers.

Among the health ministry officers would be doctors from Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital in Jakarta, RS Sadikin Hospital in Bandung and Dr Soetomo Hospital in Surabaya.

The medical team would include 20 specialists, eight general practitioners, 12 nurses, one rontgen operator and 13 field hospital officers.

Logistical aid would comprise five tons of medicines, four tons of food to supplement mother's milk and one ton of instant food.

The medical team members were currently preparing their travel documents while their equipment and logistics were to be despatched on Wednesday (21/5), Pakaysa said.

The Indonesian medical team would work in the quake-affected regions in China for one month, he said adding

Indonesia's assistance was to reciprocate the helping hand China extended when Indonesia was hit by a devastating tsunami and earthquake in the recent past.

The 7.9 earthquake which hit China's Shicuan province two weeks killed, injured and otherwise harmed tens of thousands of people.(ANTARA)

Some 160 Academicians and Experts Discuss Challenges in Digital World

Jakarta - More than 160 academics, educational experts and professionals gathered in Jakarta on Thursday (22/5) to discuss current issues and challenges for media and communication in the digital world.

"Communication is central to good understanding between our two nations and I welcome the exchange of knowledge between Indonesian and Australian academics and communication experts here today (22/5)," said Australian Ambassador to Indonesia Bill Farmer as reported on the website of the Australian embassy in Jakarta.

Two senior representatives from the University of Western Sydney, Professor Lynette Sheridan Burns and Ms Rachel Bentley, addressed the seminar.

"Audiences are no longer satisfied to simply receive information. They want to interact with it and to do this in real time using mobile technology," said Professor Burns who is Head of School and Communication Arts.

"This transformation means that we are moving from an era of one-way transmission to a new era of two way conversation, and this changes the nature and goal of communication itself," she said.

Meanwhile Associate Head of School Development Rachel Bentley said the constantly changing frontier in communication and media industries would require schools to prepare

competent graduates able to tackle these changes.

"The education sector is being challenged to integrate traditional academic areas of study with real life internship programs in partnership with media industries," she said.

The seminar was organized by Australian Education International as part of a regular seminar series presented throughout the year at the Australian Embassy in Jakarta.(ANTARA)

ENVIRONMENT ISSUES

RI's First Lady Gets UN Award for Promoting Tree Planting Movement

New York - Indonesian First Lady Ani Yudhoyono got an award from the United Nations for promoting the planting of millions of trees in Indonesia as part of the Billion Tree Planting Campaign spearheaded by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Agro-forestry Center (ICRAF).

In addition to the First Lady, UNEP also awarded the Indonesian forestry minister for supporting the global tree planting activities.

UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner presented certificates of appreciation called "Certificate of Global Leadership" to the First Lady and the forestry minister, who were represented by Dana Kartakusuma, Staff Expert of the Environmental Affairs Minister, at the UN headquarters in New York on Tuesday (13/5).

"The award from UNEP is encouragement for Indonesia to work harder and intensify tree planting activities to prevent natural disasters such as floods, erosion, and landslides which often hit the country," Dana told ANTARA.

Indonesia has at least planted 86 million trees as part of the global campaign to fight climate change.

The Billion Tree Planting Campaign, a unique worldwide tree planting initiative, aimed at empowering citizens to corporations and people up to presidents to embrace the climate change challenge, has now set its sights on planting seven billion trees.

UNEP reported that the Billion Tree Campaign has in just 18 months catalyzed the planting of two billion trees, double its original target.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, said "When the Billion Tree Campaign was launched at the Climate Convention meeting in Nairobi in 2006, no one could have imagined it could have flowered so fast and so far. But it has given expression to the frustrations but also the hopes of millions of people around the world".

"Having exceeded every target that has been set for the campaign, we are now calling on individuals, communities, business and industry, civil society organizations and governments to evolve this initiative onto a new and even higher level by the crucial climate change conference in Copenhagen in late 2009," he said.

"In 2006 we wondered if a billion tree targets were too ambitious; it was not. The goal of two billion trees has also proven to be an underestimate. The goal of planting seven billion trees - equivalent to just over a tree per person alive on the planet 'must therefore also be do-able given the campaign's extraordinary track record and the self-evident worldwide support," he added.

The Billion Tree Campaign has become a practical expression of private and public concern over global warming.

Heads of state including the presidents of Indonesia, the Maldives, Mexico, Turkey and Turkmenistan as well as businesses; cities; faith, youth

and community groups have enthusiastically taken part. Individuals have accounted for over half of all participants.(ANTARA)

Indonesian Conservationist Receives Whitley Award

Denny Kurniawan (28) of the Borneo Conservation Community, Indonesia, has won the prestigious Whitley Awards along with 10 other winners from the Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN), a British charity organization.

According to the WFN, Denny won the award for his outstanding contribution in establishing a network between the local national park and the public.

Denny had worked in the Katingan region of Kalimantan, where the creation of the Sebangau National Park; the world's largest orang utans conservation park set up in 2004, had caused rifts among the locals.

The Information and Socio-Cultural Affairs Counselor at the Indonesian Embassy in London, Herry Sudradjat, said Saturday that the award ceremony was held in conjunction with the 15th anniversary of WFN.

Denny received a cash prize worth 30,000 pound sterling donated by musician Sting and his wife Trudie Styler, plus a long-term support and the opportunity to apply for further funding, currently worth more than 0.4 million pound sterling a year (US\$0.8 million).

The Whitley Fund for Nature (WFN) is a UK registered charity offering a range of Awards and grants to outstanding nature conservationists around the world.

Other Whitley Award and Associate Award recipients this year hailed from Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, China, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Peru and Turkey.

Apart from Denny, two other Indonesians have won the awards so

far, namely Dr. Rignolda Djamaluddin in 2006 and Mirza Kusri in 2007. (The Jakarta Post)

REGIONAL/INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

RI Ranks Ahead of U.S. and Russia on Global Peace Index

Indonesia is a much more peaceful country than global powers the United States and Russia, an annual study on global peace revealed in London on Tuesday (20/5).

With peace in Aceh, improving human rights conditions throughout the country, regional terrorism under control and an absence of any kind of major violence, Indonesia ranked 68th on the 2008 Global Peace Index (GPI) of 140 countries.

The two-year-old GPI, brainchild of Australian technology entrepreneur and philanthropist Steve Killelea, is drawn up by the Institute for Economics and Peace, an independent think tank, in association with the UK-based Economist Intelligence Unit.

"The world appears to be a marginally more peaceful place this year," Killelea told AFP in London.

"This is encouraging, but it takes small steps by individual countries for the world to make greater strides on the road to peace," he said.

The United States, the world's only remaining superpower, is often touted as a staunch defender of world peace, democracy and human rights. But the GPI study shows it in a different light.

The United States, which spends \$1.3 billion per day on its military, scored very poorly, ranking lower than Rwanda, Syria, Cuba and Libya. It came in at 97 on the list.

In 2008, the U.S. government allocated \$481.4 billion for its annual

defense budget -- an 11.3 percent increase from the \$439.3 billion it allocated in 2006. Present global military spending stands at \$1.47 trillion.

Another factor contributing to its weak showing was the fact the United States has more people in prisons than any other state in the world.

Former superpower Russia came in at 131 on the list. Despite improving conditions in the troubled province of Chechnya, Russia is entangled in disputes with several neighbouring countries.

China ranked ahead of Indonesia at 67, and India came in at 107.

Smaller countries, especially from Europe, rated well on the GPI. Iceland tops the list as the most peaceful country, with Denmark and Norway taking second and third spots. Two countries from the Asia-Pacific region, New Zealand and Japan -- the only country to suffer a nuclear bombing -- placed 4th and 5th, respectively.

Iraq rounded out the bottom of the list for the second year in a row. Other conflict-riddled states such as Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Israel and Chad came in just ahead of Iraq.

The GPI rates each nation on a range of potential drivers or determinants of peace, including a nation's relations with its neighbors, arms sales and foreign troop deployments, levels of democracy and transparency, education and respect for human rights.

It also considers data on a country's crime rate, its prison population and the potential for terrorism within its borders. (The Jakarta Post)

RI Gains Support for Virus Sharing Proposal

Indonesia's proposal for a virus-sharing mechanism to benefit developing nations has gained a major

boost, with 112 countries throwing their weight behind the idea.

The support was expressed at the first Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Health Ministers Meeting in Geneva on Wednesday (21/5). The event is being attended by representatives of 193 countries, Indonesian Health Minister Siti Fadilah Supari said Saturday (24/5).

The meeting was held in conjunction with the World Health Assembly, which concluded on Saturday (24/5).

Speaking at a media conference on her arrival at Soekarno-Hatta airport in Jakarta, Minister Siti said the supporting participants praised Indonesia's Responsible Virus Sharing and Benefits Sharing proposal as "more transparent, fair and equal" for developing countries.

"We received moral and political support from health ministers from England, Russia, Iran and Australia," Siti said.

"Russia, for example, offered cooperation in the field of healthcare, such as by providing training for medical workers, and with the production of medicines and a new avian flu vaccine."

A bilateral meeting between Indonesia and Russia will follow in next few weeks, she said.

During her stay in Geneva, Siti also held talks with U.S. health secretary Michael Leavitt to discuss the Material Transfer Agreement (MTA), a scheme for global sample sharing rules. The two met in Jakarta in April for the same purpose.

During the WHO meeting, Siti called for the replacement of the 60-year-old Global Initiative Surveillance Network (GISN), which, she said, benefited developed countries at the expense of developing ones.

The cooperation and support from NAM countries during the negotiations for the new mechanism is a show of solidarity to improve healthcare in developing countries, Siti said.

"It is time for developing countries to unite to avoid becoming victims of powerful countries," she said.

Indonesia attracted international concern when it refused to share avian influenza virus samples last year, demanding a guarantee from richer nations and pharmaceutical companies they would provide access to affordable vaccines derived from their samples.

Poor countries like Indonesia, which have been hit hardest by avian influenza, suffer most from a lack of access to costly vaccines produced by Western companies using isolates obtained from the GISN.

Siti wrote about what she described as her long struggle against global injustice in her book *Saatnya Dunia Berubah, Tangan Tuhan dibalik Flu Burung* (It's Time for the World to Change, Divine Hands behind Bird Flu).

In the controversial book, she raises suspicions that the WHO and the U.S. have conspired to force developing countries, including Indonesia, into buying expensive bird flu vaccines. The WHO and the U.S. have denied the allegations.

Indonesia's permanent representative to the UN in Geneva, Makarim Wibisono, said the issue of sharing virus samples would be discussed further at a meeting of the permanent representatives of NAM member countries to the UN, in Geneva on June 30.

"There will be resolution of the issue. We will later take this resolution to the International Governmental Meeting on Pandemic Influenza Preparedness in November," Makarim said. (The Jakarta Post)