

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's State Visit to Indonesia (6–8 July 2026): A Cultural Diplomacy Perspective



PM Modi, Indonesian President inaugurate India-backed restoration of UNESCO-listed Prambanan Temple, reaffirm shared civilisational ties. DD India. <https://ddindia.co.in/2026/07/pm-modi-indonesian-president-inaugurate-india-backed-restoration-of-unesco-listed-prambanan-temple-reaffirm-shared-civilisational-ties/>

India and Indonesia share one of Asia's oldest and most enduring civilisational partnerships, forged through centuries of maritime connectivity, commercial exchanges, the diffusion of Hindu-Buddhist traditions, shared epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and sustained people-to-people interactions.

The imprint of Indian civilisation remains deeply embedded in Indonesia's cultural landscape, reflected in its temples, language, performing arts, literary heritage, philosophical traditions and living cultural practices. This shared heritage has endowed the bilateral relationship with a unique civilisational depth, making it one of the most compelling examples of historical continuity and cultural interconnectedness in the Indo-Pacific. Although contemporary India–Indonesia relations have expanded significantly across strategic, economic, maritime, technological and security domains, the partnership continues to derive its resilience and legitimacy from shared cultural values, historical consciousness and the

effective deployment of cultural diplomacy and soft power. In this context, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's State Visit to Indonesia from 6–8 July 2026 reaffirmed that the India–Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership is anchored not merely in converging geopolitical and economic interests, but in a profound civilisational affinity that continues to foster mutual trust, strengthen societal linkages and provide a durable foundation for long-term bilateral cooperation in an evolving regional and global order.

The cultural significance of the visit was evident from its very beginning. Prime Minister Narendra Modi received a warm ceremonial welcome in Jakarta, reflecting Indonesia's deep respect for India's civilisational heritage and the centuries-old friendship between the two countries. His interaction with the Indian diaspora further underscored the human dimension of bilateral relations. Describing the diaspora as a living bridge between India and Indonesia, he encouraged community members to introduce their Indonesian friends to India's rich cultural heritage and inspire them to visit the country. The interaction reaffirmed the diaspora's growing role in strengthening people-to-people ties, promoting tourism, and expanding India's cultural outreach across Southeast Asia.

One of the most memorable cultural moments of the visit was the interaction between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Prabowo Subianto with the traditional Indonesian Angklung, a UNESCO-recognised bamboo musical instrument that symbolises harmony and collective participation. Their spontaneous musical performance, including the rendition of a popular Indian melody, transformed a formal diplomatic engagement into a celebration of shared cultural appreciation and friendship. More importantly, the episode demonstrated how music can transcend political and linguistic boundaries, fostering emotional connections that strengthen mutual understanding and reaffirm the growing significance of cultural diplomacy in contemporary international relations.

The cultural richness of the visit was further reflected during the State Banquet hosted by President Prabowo Subianto, where traditional Indonesian music, dance and artistic performances celebrated the country's diverse cultural heritage. The programme showcased Indonesia's vibrant artistic traditions while underscoring the mutual respect both countries

accord to each other's cultural identities. These cultural engagements demonstrated that artistic expression remains an effective instrument of public diplomacy, fostering trust, goodwill and emotional affinity beyond the framework of official negotiations.

A defining highlight of the visit was the joint visit of Prime Minister Modi and President Prabowo to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of *Prambanan Temple*, one of the world's largest Hindu temple complexes. Describing Prambanan as a timeless symbol of the centuries-old bond between India and Indonesia, Prime Minister Modi observed that the monument represents a living expression of shared civilisational memory rather than merely a historical landmark. Together with Borobudur, Prambanan embodies the pluralistic civilisational exchanges through which Hindu and Buddhist traditions travelled from the Indian subcontinent to Southeast Asia, shaping a shared cultural landscape that continues to enrich contemporary bilateral relations. The visit underscored the growing importance of heritage diplomacy, in which shared cultural monuments serve as enduring symbols of historical continuity, mutual respect and people-to-people trust.

The visit also advanced cultural cooperation through tangible heritage initiatives. Both leaders welcomed the inauguration of the India-supported restoration and conservation project at the Prambanan Temple Complex, undertaken by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), reaffirming their shared commitment to preserving their common cultural heritage. Indonesia also appreciated India's gift of a replica of the ninth-century Nalanda Copper Plate, symbolising the deep intellectual, Buddhist and scholarly linkages that have connected the two civilisations for centuries. The reaffirmation of the Kashi Cultural Pathway further reinforced the shared commitment to heritage conservation, archaeology, museums and the protection of cultural assets. Collectively, these initiatives demonstrated that the preservation of shared heritage has become a significant pillar of contemporary India–Indonesia cultural diplomacy, strengthening civilisational ties while creating new avenues for long-term cultural cooperation.

The visit imparted fresh momentum to educational and intellectual exchanges by recognising the enduring legacies of Rabindranath Tagore

and Ki Hajar Dewantara in strengthening cultural understanding between the two countries. In this spirit, both leaders declared 2026–2027 as the "*Tagore–Dewantara Year of India–Indonesia Cultural and Educational Diplomacy*", commemorating the centenary of Tagore's visit to Indonesia. The initiative aims to promote year-long cultural festivals, literary exchanges, academic collaborations and educational programmes, thereby transforming shared historical memories into enduring institutional partnerships. Complementing this vision, both countries agreed to expand student mobility, strengthen university partnerships, promote joint research and deepen academic cooperation. They also welcomed the proposal to establish a campus of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Bengaluru in Indonesia, reflecting their shared commitment to fostering long-term educational and knowledge-based collaboration.

The visit further reaffirmed that the India–Indonesia relationship derives its uniqueness from centuries of maritime connectivity linking the Indian subcontinent with the ancient Srivijaya and Majapahit kingdoms. These interactions facilitated the exchange of religion, language, philosophy, literature, architecture, and artistic traditions, creating a shared civilisational space across the Indian Ocean. The continued influence of Sanskrit-derived vocabulary in Bahasa Indonesia, together with the enduring popularity of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, demonstrates that the bilateral relationship has been shaped by sustained cultural exchange, intellectual interaction, and maritime connectivity. These enduring civilisational linkages continue to reinforce mutual trust, deepen people-to-people understanding, and serve as a lasting source of India's cultural influence and soft power across Southeast Asia.

Another significant symbolic moment of the visit was the conferment of Indonesia's highest civilian honour, the Bintang Adipurna, upon Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Accepting the award on behalf of the people of India, the Prime Minister described it as a tribute to the warmth, mutual respect, and centuries-old friendship shared by the two nations. Beyond recognising contemporary leadership, the honour reflected Indonesia's appreciation of India's enduring civilisational legacy and reaffirmed the deep cultural goodwill that continues to underpin bilateral relations. Collectively, the visit demonstrated that heritage conservation, artistic exchanges, educational cooperation, diaspora engagement and symbolic

public diplomacy have become integral pillars of the India–Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. More importantly, it reaffirmed that culture is not merely a legacy inherited from the past but a dynamic instrument of contemporary diplomacy, enabling both countries to deepen mutual trust, strengthen people-to-people ties, and foster a more inclusive, resilient and culturally connected Indo-Pacific.

Conclusion

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's State Visit to Indonesia reaffirmed that the India–Indonesia relationship is fundamentally a civilisational partnership anchored in shared heritage, cultural values and enduring people-to-people ties. From the symbolic Angklung interaction and the visit to the Prambanan Temple to heritage conservation initiatives, the declaration of the Tagore–Dewantara Year of Cultural and Educational Diplomacy, expanded academic cooperation and the conferment of the Bintang Adipurna, every major engagement underscored the central role of culture in strengthening bilateral relations. The visit ultimately demonstrated that while strategic cooperation continues to broaden the scope of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, it is shared civilisation, cultural diplomacy and historical continuity that provide India–Indonesia relations with their enduring resilience, legitimacy and long-term strategic direction.