

FOREIGN MISSIONS

Canberra to build largest embassy in Jakarta

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Australian Ambassador to Indonesia Greg Moriarty is seeking the support of Jakarta Governor Joko "Jokowi" Widodo for the construction of Canberra's new embassy in Jakarta, which is poised to be its largest in the world.

The Australian envoy met with the governor at City Hall on Tuesday as members of an Islamic group staged a rally calling on the governor to reject a similar plan by the US Embassy in Jakarta.

"We very much look forward to working with him in the future, including to build a new Australian Embassy in Jakarta, which will be the largest Australian Embassy anywhere in the world," Moriarty told reporters after the meeting.

The new embassy complex will be built on a 40,500-square-meter site in Patra Kuningan, South Jakarta, one block down from the current Australian Embassy on Jl. HR Rasuna Said. Some of the land was bought from a private company, while the rest was city property the administration had agreed to sell. In September, the embassy announced that a joint venture between Australian-Indonesian firm PT Leighton Contractors Indonesia and construction company PT Total Bangun Persada had won the A\$230 million (US\$241 million) contract to build the new complex.

Australia, which is trying to play a larger role in Asia, has long planned to move its embassy from its current location, which became the target of a terrorist attack in 2004 when a bomb exploded outside its gates, killing nine Indonesians and injuring more than 180 people.

Moriarty's meeting with Jokowi was part of a series of courtesy calls made by foreign ambassadors. In the past week, the governor met with Brunei Darussalam Ambassador Dato Paduka Haji Mahmud Bin Haji Saidi, Korean Ambassador Kim Young-sun and Palestinian Ambassador Fariz Mehdawi.

Moriarty said he also talked with the Jakarta governor about the possible contributions the neighboring country might make to the development of the city. "We will be helping with some technical work studies in relation to mass transit. We're also looking at the possibility of helping with the development of some private-public partnerships in relation to water supply projects in Jakarta in the long-term."

Also on Tuesday, dozens of members of firebrand group Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) staged a rally in front of City Hall, protesting a plan by the US Embassy to build new diplomatic facilities on the existing embassy complex.

HTI said that the new US Embassy building would serve as a symbol of US domination over Indonesia.

"We demand that the administration reject the project because it will be a means of further domination of the US over Indonesia, especially in terms of politics and the economy," the group said in its statement. It claimed that the new US facilities in Jakarta would be its third-biggest in the world after those in Pakistan and Iraq.

The new US diplomatic facilities, costing \$302 million and covering a total of 47,000 square meters, will be built to provide workspace for approximately 1,300 embassy staff members and the US mission to ASEAN, according to the US Embassy website. The new complex will include a 10-story tower for consular and office space, with an attached residence for Marine security guards, as well as a multi-story parking garage.

Governor Jokowi said he did not yet know the details of the US Embassy project, but ensured that the project would go on if it complied with existing regulations.