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Illegal immigrant and terrorism issues to dominate Kuching summit

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EFFORTS to counter terrorism and the continued influx of Indonesian illegal immigrants into Malaysia will be the focus of discussions between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and President Megawati Sukarnoputri when they meet in Kuching today.

The summit of the two leaders is an annual consultation, held to discuss issues of mutual interest. The last meeting was in Bali in August last year, just two months before the bombing there which killed 212.

About three weeks ago, the Marriott Jakarta was bombed killing 14 people, an indication that terrorist activities in Indonesia has intensified.

As Jemaah Islamiyah, which also has links in Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia, has claimed responsibility for the bombings, surely these countries are also not free from the threat of terrorism.

Regional and bilateral co-operation is therefore necessary.

Dr Mahathir and Megawati are therefore expected to discuss concrete bilateral measures to combat terrorism.

Diplomats say these will include enhancing existing intelligence exchanges between authorities of the two countries in a bid to create an early warning system of possible terror attacks.

The two leaders are also expected to discuss the seemingly never-ending problem of Indonesian illegals flocking to Malaysia to find a better life.

There are several hundred thousand Indonesian illegals in Malaysia who have come here with the hope of getting jobs. Those who did not, resorted to crime.

This has become a big headache for Malaysian officials. Without co-operation from their Indonesian counterparts, the problem can never be effectively fought.

Only a sincere two-pronged approach on the part of Indonesia can see a reduction of their nationals landing on the various illegal entry points in Malaysia.

Firstly, Indonesian authorities must increase patrols of coast-lines and border areas to ensure that their nationals are not trying to gain entry into Malaysia illegally.

Needless to say, the problem, like all other problems, is best checked at source.

Secondly, those being deported must be accepted by the Indonesian authorities without conditions. There have been many cases in the past where Indonesian authorities rejected their own nationals who were being deported because they did not have proper documents.

Malaysia has even gone to the extent of bearing half the cost of deporting the illegals, although it is not compelled to do so under any international treaty or convention.

In return, Indonesia must give its full co-operation to curb the problem, now seen as a threat to national security.

On the part of Malaysia, allegations that Indonesians are finding it easy to obtain permanent resident status in Malaysia, must be investigated. The idea that PR status is easy to come by, is luring more Indonesians into Malaysia.

If there are elements of corruption, action must be taken against those involved.

Besides bilateral issues such as trade and investment, co-operation on

education, commodities, haze mitigation and tourism, Dr Mahathir and Megawati are also expected to discuss regional and international matters.

They include the agenda for the forthcoming Asean Summit in Bali, the Organisation of Islamic Conference in Kuala Lumpur and the activities of the Non-Aligned Movement, of which Malaysia is chairman.