

**Demos have changed KL-Jakarta ties**  
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Recent ugly demonstrations in front of the Malaysian embassy here by the People's Democratic Front (Bendera) seem to have changed the scenario in the diplomacy of Malaysia-Indonesia ties.

NONEThe lobbing of faeces into the embassy compound and burning of the Malaysian flag in protest against the alleged arrest of three Indonesian fisheries officers by Malaysian marine police in the vicinity of Riau waters on Aug 13 seem to have hurt relations somewhat.

Kuala Lumpur insists that the Indonesian fisheries authorities had intruded into Malaysian waters and abducted seven Malaysian fishermen on that date.

Jakarta, on the other hand, claims that the Malaysian fishermen had trespassed into Indonesian waters.

While the situation in Malaysia is just heating up, the situation here has reached a serious level with calls on Indonesia to sever diplomatic ties.

Universiti Indonesia international relations senior lecturer Andi Widjojanto was among those who had made the suggestion.

He called for the downgrading of diplomatic ties with Malaysia, if not sever them as a shock therapy.

NONEIndonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who had often been blamed for not being firm, said the best solution was via talks but stressed that Indonesia would not compromise over its territory.

Susilo has sent a letter to Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, expressing the hope that the problem would be settled amicably and that border talks would continue.

Social activists who did not favour close Malaysia-Indonesia ties were quick to seize the opportunity by harping on nationalism and blaming Susilo for giving in too much in the negotiations with Malaysia.

Politicians, including Indonesian cabinet ministers, were quick to blame Malaysia for the Riau incident, fanned by media reports that painted Malaysia as an arrogant nation.

Pressure has prompted Indonesian Foreign Minister Dr Marty Natalegawa to send a diplomatic note to Malaysia protesting the action of Malaysian marine police and claiming that the incident occurred in Indonesia territory.

Indonesia based its decision on a 2009 map while Malaysia is using a 1979 map.

NONEMalaysia replied insisting that it occurred off Johor based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982.

The Indonesian media used issues like mistreatment of Indonesian domestic maids by Malaysian employers and Indonesians facing death sentences for drug and other serious offences to sow hatred in Indonesians against Malaysia.

A poll by the Republika daily on Aug 23 revealed that 3,607 respondents or 72.91 per cent said Malaysia was the least friendly among seven countries, among them Australia, Singapore, Brunei and the Philippines.

Malaysia too faces problems in Indonesia where the land on which the ambassador's residence is located in Kemang, South Jakarta, was seized by some people.

It took 12 years for the court to return the land although it is Jakarta's responsibility to protect foreign diplomats.

Some 48,000 hectares of oil palm plantation belonging to Sime Darby, mostly in Kalimantan, are under threat of being auctioned while Petronas, which was invited to invest with the promise of being able to sell subsidised fuel, was only given limited rights in Sumatera.

The meeting between Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman and Dr Marty on Sept 6 in Kota Kinabalu to discuss border issues is seen as a positive step.

Since border disputes are not something which can be resolved overnight and there is a possibility of them recurring, it is hoped that the mechanisms in place would be fully utilised to maintain cordial bilateral ties.

- Bernama

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