

KL, Jakarta vow to mend stormy ties
Malaysiakini.com
Nov 12, 2009

Malaysia and Indonesia vowed today to overcome a series of disputes that have soured their relationship, including maid abuse and territorial conflicts.

"Surely there will be differences in opinion between us occasionally," Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said at a joint press conference along with a smiling Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak.

"Our job as leaders is to handle it wisely and not let it blow up and affect what we have," he said at the end of a two-day official visit aimed at smoothing over the latest spats between the neighbours.

The two countries have much in common including language, religion and culture, but their relationship has been turbulent and marred by frequent disagreements.

Najib said the neighbours would strive to improve grassroots ties through better cooperation between lawmakers and the establishment of friendship societies.

The two leaders also announced plans to boost cooperation in the food and energy sectors. Najib said Malaysia would consider supplying its excess energy capacity to Indonesia.

News reports last month said Malaysian power giant Tenaga Nasional would send electricity to Indonesia via high-voltage cables, in a 600-megawatt project to be operational in 2015.

In the area of food security, Yudhoyono said Indonesia and Malaysia could jointly invest in food production in a climate of rising commodity prices.

"(We have) a lot of land and labour and we can jointly develop agricultural clusters and food estates in Indonesia," he said.

Relations have dived since June when Indonesia said Malaysian warships entered oil-rich waters of the disputed Ambalat area in the Sulawesi sea off northeastern Borneo island.

An Indonesian navy ship came within moments of firing on a Malaysian vessel.

Tensions have also been aggravated by allegations of cultural theft, and horrific cases of abuse of Indonesian maids, which led to Jakarta putting a temporary ban on sending domestic workers to Malaysia.

Yudhoyono urged Malaysia to prosecute abusers quickly.

"These cases must be dealt with by the law speedily and fairly before it becomes another issue which could jeopardise our relationship," he said.

"I'm satisfied with what we have achieved now although this must not be taken for granted and we should continue to improve the system," he said of the ongoing talks on the issue.

We will protect our migrant workers

Najib assured Indonesia that its migrant workers would be protected.

"We appreciate their presence here and we will continue to protect their interests and if there are any transgressions of the law, they will be dealt with accordingly, he said.

One of Asia's largest importers of labour, Malaysia depends heavily on domestic workers, mainly from Indonesia, but has been criticised for not introducing legislation to enshrine their rights and conditions.

Cultural issues, long a flashpoint between the two countries, have also added to the troubles.

Earlier this year anger erupted over erroneous reports that Malaysia had screened tourism advertisements featuring the traditional "pendet" dance of Indonesia's Hindu-majority Bali island.

The ad was actually a promotion for a Discovery Channel programme, but did little to quell a media-fuelled rage in Indonesia that saw protesters vow to "crush Malaysia" and organise vigilante sweeps aimed at rounding up Malaysians.

Yudhoyono departs later today for Singapore, where he is to attend this weekend's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit.

- *AFP*

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/117259>