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End in sight to age-old issues

KL and Jakarta begin work to resolve several outstanding issues

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PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia wasted no time in getting Indonesia's agreement to resolve lingering issues, which included maritime territorial claims and maid supply, during talks between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and visiting President Joko Widodo yesterday.

Joko, better known as Jokowi, has agreed to Malaysia's proposal to appoint a special envoy to resolve the maritime territorial claims in the Sulawesi Sea which had been a stumbling block to ties strained in 2005 when naval vessels from both countries "brushed" against each other in the oil-rich area.

In a further boost to the strong trade ties, the two leaders witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding involving Proton on the cooperation for the production of an Indonesian national car.

The other nagging issues – maid supply and treatment of fishermen encroaching into territorial waters – were also highlighted with both leaders emphasising the need to abide by the two earlier signed MoUs to help resolve the two issues.

The Prime Minister has persistently raised maritime territorial claims during past leaders' annual consultation with Indonesia and he finally got Jakarta's nod at yesterday's meeting for the special envoy to be appointed as part of a two-track mechanism to resolve the issue. It is understood that Malaysia has already selected a candidate for the role.

The special envoy would hold negotiations at an exploratory level to find a formula that could be accepted by both governments.

"If it shows positive signs for the formula to resolve the issue of maritime borders, we can begin formal negotiations," Najib told a joint press conference with Jokowi after their private meeting at the Perdana Putra building here yesterday.

He said the two-track approach was necessary because years of negotiations had not produced any significant achievement.

"Maritime borders issues are complex and it (solution) has been delayed for far too long while the 26 meetings by the technical committee have not shown any significant achievement.

"We decided to continue the effort of finding the solutions on the two-track approach and hoped there will be positive development.

"Bapak President has showed his political will in seeking a solution, so has Malaysia," he said.

On fishermen trespassing into waters of the two countries, Najib said he and Jokowi noted that there was an agreement that those who encroached into disputed areas would be chased away without any legal action taken against them.

The Indonesian President, in his parting remarks at the conference, said Indonesia would open its door to Malaysian investors as "widely as possible", addressing concerns over his government's perceived nationalistic policy.

Malaysian officials described the mood of the bilateral meeting as very good. "They obviously have chemistry and they get along well."

Crowd puller: Najib and Jokowi greeting well-wishers after Friday prayers at Masjid Putra in Putrajaya. – Bernama

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