

Anwar-Jokowi bond

The resolve of the two may just be the grand reserve we need

THE *Jakarta Post's* editorial on Monday said it all: Welcome home, Prime Minister Anwar. Indonesia has been Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's second home for at least 20 years when he was in the political wilderness. What Malaysia's leaders denied him support and consolation Indonesia gave him. Then president B.J. Habibie and senior politicians in the cabinet and outside of it were the first to be on his side. It is, therefore, not a surprise that Anwar chose Indonesia to be the first country for a state visit since he became prime minister in November. Not surprisingly, too, Indonesian President Joko Widodo, affectionately known as Jokowi, reciprocated thus: "I am also personally honoured that Indonesia is the first stop."

Sure there are quarrels like whose *rendang* is it? Such rivalry over meat and assorted other things is but a sibling quibble. For every *rendang tok* Malaysia points to, Indonesia is ready with Minang meat in lemongrass. Siblings grow out of it, don't they? Besides, life is more than *rendang*. Like getting together to grow Nusantara, the new capital in the making. Size-wise, there are three Singapores there in the future capital, and Indonesia would surely need Malaysia's help. And Malaysia is ready, able and willing. Eleven commitments in the form of letters of intent and memoranda of understanding worth RM1 billion were signed, a

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good start for a two-day PM-led visit. Malaysian businessmen are nursing a hope that there will be more, with or without more state visits.

Indonesian businessmen, too, are harbouring a similar hope. But graft is standing in their way, say Indonesian firms. So are slow approvals. As for graft, Anwar has given them Putrajaya's assurance that the scourge would be met head on. Slow approvals will soon be a thing of the past, Anwar told them, as Putrajaya wants to make it easy for them to do business in Malaysia. There are thornier problems than the meat and gravy mix, though. Such as safeguarding Indonesian migrant workers and border demarcation issues. A buggy tour around the palace grounds of Istana Bogor helps, especially when Anwar is the first leader to be honoured with it.

It is not easy to get a president to "buggy" you around, even if you are a prime minister. And there was the invitation extended to the PM to plant the *Hopea odorata*, locally known as Merawan, in the palace backyard. Sure, a two-day visit doesn't solve everything there is to solve, but it makes a follow-up that much easier. Friends solve problems better than squabbling siblings.

Friends can put up a good fight together against adversaries, too. One such is against the European Union's attempt to ban palm oil imports from Indonesia and Malaysia, two of the world's biggest producers of the crop. Jokowi is looking for a united front against such discriminatory practices of the bloc. It is in the interest of Malaysia to fight the good fight. Anwar is only too aware of Jokowi's "warring" words with leaders of the bloc at the EU-Asean Summit last month: be just in your policies and desist from imposing your ideals on developing countries. Well said, Mr President. We are sure Anwar would have said the same if you didn't beat him to it. It is friendship such as this that makes hope triumph. Yes, things can only get better.