

Stronger Malaysia-Indonesia ties after PM's visit

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JAKARTA: There is a newfound sense of euphoria between Malaysia and Indonesia following Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's first official trip abroad as Prime Minister.

There are high expectations to iron out the thorny issues, mainly that concerning the protection of Indonesian migrant workers as the two countries move towards opening up a new page in their bilateral relations.

Indonesian Ambassador Hermono said there was a sense of optimism with Anwar's high-profile visit to the Indonesian capital.

"We now have very high expectations. On our side, we hope that the Indonesian migrant worker issues will finally be resolved," he said.

During his two-day state visit to Jakarta, Anwar said it was not just his first official trip abroad but one that carried a lot more in terms of

personal and sentimental values.

"This is a bit personal to me and President Jokowi knows that Indonesia always has a special place in my heart," Anwar said after the meeting with the Indonesian leader at the National Palace in Bogor.

Anwar was taken on a tour of the famed Kebun Raya Bogor on the palace grounds in a buggy driven by Jokowi.

The Kebun Raya Bogor is a 205-year-old Unesco-recognised botanical garden - covering an area of 87ha and containing 13,983 different kinds of trees - located adjacent to the presidential palace grounds.

Hermono pointed out his president's gestures showed his commitment to building warm ties with Malaysia, with Indonesia represented by seven ministers during the bilateral meeting.

"He wants to show Pak Anwar we are serious and that we will give you our best," the envoy said.

Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta have both pledged to embark on a renewed commitment to not only strengthen the nations' bilateral relations but also resolve outstanding issues.

Aside from that, Malaysian firms hope to participate in Indonesia's newly planned capital Nusantara, on the Bornean island of Kalimantan.

International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Zafrul Aziz, who was part of Anwar's delegation, said total trade between Malaysia and Indonesia had grown by 30% last year compared with 2021.

"In terms of investments, Miti looks forward to facilitating more mutual cross-border investments between Malaysia and Indonesia in various sectors.

"In the coming days, my ministry looks forward to meeting with the Indonesian side for the purpose of mutual collaboration," he added.

Hermono noted that the challenge now for both leaders is to show tangible results of their discussions.

"If we fail to do so, there will definitely be a trust deficit. The people will say that it is just political talk and formalities.

"Now both sides will have to sit down and talk about how we can move forward and deliver. Or else it will be difficult," he said.

If Malaysia and Indonesia cannot deliver on public expectations, frustrations will run high, the envoy cautioned.

"Since we are close friends, we need to show results. If a close friend cannot fulfil a promise, the damage will be bigger," he said.

Hermono said Anwar had stated that within a period of six months, there should be some concrete outcome.

"We are of course in a positive mood now and are confident things will move in the right direction," he said.

Political analyst Oh Ei Sun said Anwar held a very personal gratitude to Indonesia, adding that when the latter was in the political wilderness, major Indonesian figures did not abandon him.

"So I would imagine that under his leadership, Malaysia and Indonesia would enter into another stretch of a golden era in bilateral relations, hopefully with close economic interactions," he added.

At a session at the National Palace in Bogor, where both Anwar and Jokowi issued their joint-statement, the Prime Minister told the Indonesian leader that he would do his best to resolve issues of concern to Jakarta.

These include the welfare and treatment of Indonesian workers in Malaysia, education opportunities for the Indonesian migrant population in Malaysia and border demarcation issues - matters that Jokowi had underlined in his statement.