

ANWAR DEFENDS MARITIME TREATIES

PM refutes claims govt has signed away nation's interest in Ambalat block in Sulawesi Sea

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has refuted accusations that the federal government has signed off on the country's interest in a maritime area in the Sulawesi Sea known as the Ambalat block.

He described the allegations as baseless and outright slander.

He reiterated that the treaties signed during a visit by his Indonesian counterpart, Joko Widodo, to Malaysia earlier this month involved only maritime territorial disputes that had been resolved and finalised between Malaysia and Indonesia.

"The negotiation (on maritime territorial disputes) that has yet to be finalised (between Indonesia and Malaysia) included the area referred to as the Ambalat block.

"They (the opposition), however, are being *bingai* (stupid).

"As I said before, the negotiations (between Malaysia and Indonesia) on the Ambalat block have yet to be resolved. The same goes for areas in Pulau Sebatik, Sabah."

He said this at the launch of the "Sentuhan Kasih Desa" programme here yesterday.

Present were Deputy Prime

Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who is also rural and regional development minister, Defence Minister and Rembau member of parliament Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan, Negri Sembilan Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Aminuddin Harun and Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Zuki Ali.

Former foreign minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Abdullah had previously asked Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir to give a detailed explanation on the Ambalat block issue following the signing of maritime border agreements between Malaysia and Indonesia on June 8.

Anwar, meanwhile, said: "Indonesia is our neighbour and friend.

"I do not wish to make an enemy of Indonesia. We depend on each other and want to foster closer ties.

"When we negotiate, it takes scores of years. For 18 years, we have been discussing the (maritime) borders."

He said the maritime agreement was signed only after obtaining advice and agreement from various quarters.

"My instruction to the officers was to find a solution and follow the rules. Who decided on this? The Survey and Mapping Department, the Home Ministry, the Defence Ministry and the A-G. Only when this was done did I sign it.

"This is an example of how facts can be manipulated by those claiming to be *ustaz* and *tok guru*. That's why we need to refer to the facts."

On another subject, he said the country's economic recovery would take time.

He said aspirations to accelerate the economy were delayed due to the high deficit and debt amounting to RM1.5 trillion inherited from the past administration.

"Some have questioned why we keep harping on what was done in the past.

"However, the people must know what happened.

"It has always been our wish to boost the economy at a rapid pace. But we must realise that we have inherited a 'gloomy' economy.

"They (the previous administration) were the ones responsible for the debt situation, which has reached RM1.5 trillion.

"And now, they want us (the unity government) to solve the problem within a year or two, which is not easy.

"Nevertheless, we will spare no effort and try our best to improve the economy."

He said although his unity government was only seven months old, it had brought down the country's deficit from 5.6 to five per cent.

"Some questioned why we did not manage to bring down the deficit further.

"I refuse to do so at the expense of welfare and development projects for the people.

"If the government reduces the deficit further, this means we have to cut down on the allocations of rural development projects and programmes to improve the health and education sectors.

"What we did was reduce the allocations for mega projects.

"We instead channelled the allocations to rural development projects and to improve the education sector."