

# Resolving issues with Indonesia

## Better chance now with Prabowo at republic's helm, say officials

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**PETALING JAYA:** Longstanding issues between Malaysia and Indonesia, especially involving the border and migrant workers, have a better chance of resolution with President Prabowo Subianto at the helm, say officials.

They said Prabowo's four-decade-old friendship with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim would be a big advantage in managing issues.

One thorny issue involves an area in the oil-rich Sulawesi Sea called the Ambalat region, which both countries have claimed.

Indonesian Ambassador to Malaysia Hermono said he was counting on his president's special attachment to Malaysia and Anwar to help overcome bottlenecks.

"If they can resolve these problems ami-

cably and quickly, then I see a very robust relationship between Malaysia and Indonesia," he said.

Hermono said Prabowo felt a special attachment to Malaysia as he briefly went to school here, besides fondly referring to Anwar as his brother.

"President Prabowo cares deeply about Indonesians working abroad," he added.

Malaysia and Indonesia are due to hold meetings of their joint task force on Indonesian migrant workers later this year, with the focus on a 2004 agreement on its workers in the plantation, construction and services sectors (excluding domestic workers) on wages, welfare and agent fees expected to be reviewed.

Hermono said Prabowo had recently revamped how Indonesia managed its overseas workers by creating a specific ministry for them, adding that previously, such issues were handled by the republic's Manpower Ministry.

The new ministry is expected to take the lead for Indonesia during the joint task force meetings, he added.

Hermono said when Prabowo was Defence Minister, he had pledged to resolve disputes over Malaysia and Indonesia's maritime borders in the Ambalat region in the Sulawesi Sea.

International relations analyst Dr Azmi Hassan said trade and commerce between both sides were expected to pick up under Prabowo's term with the latter having pledged in his election campaign to boost economic growth.

He said bilateral trade would also enjoy a boost with Prabowo's aim to make Indonesia an advanced nation by 2045.

"Prabowo will be spending big on infrastructure development and he has said Indonesia needs a helping hand and a good friend so that these projects can take off.

"In this context, trade between Malaysia

and Indonesia, and with Asean, will pick up significantly," he added.

Azmi pointed to the special kinship between Anwar and Prabowo, which he said even endured when the former was imprisoned, adding that he was confident that this would have a positive impact in resolving the Ambalat dispute.

"The Ambalat dispute is very sensitive given that the national petroleum companies of both nations are currently prospecting for oil in the area," said Azmi who is from the Nusantara Academy for Strategic Research.

Anwar was among several world leaders who attended the swearing-in of Prabowo in Jakarta last week.

In 2023, Malaysia exported US\$11.16bil (RM48.4bil) worth of goods and services to Indonesia, while imports from the latter amounted to US\$13.22bil (RM57.34bil) in the same period, according to a United Nations database on international trade.