

Troubleshooter to engage Indonesia on any issue

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TOWARDS STRONGER TIES: Muhyiddin also clarifies Malaysia won't stake claim to Tor Tor dance

JAKARTA: THE cabinet will discuss appointing a "troubleshooter" to immediately engage with Jakarta in the event of any contentious issue which threatens to strain the two neighbours' relations, especially where its people are concerned.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the cabinet would deliberate on the best candidate to assume the "official spokesman" role and serve as a direct line in addressing issues, even before they were highlighted.

"Arising issues, especially those that are contentious, must be quickly addressed. It is crucial to have a direct line that works speedily in dealing with misconceptions and ill perception," he told the Malaysian media covering his six-day working visit to Indonesia.

Muhyiddin, accompanied by senior Umno politicians yesterday, met with top leaders of Indonesia's political parties to discuss, among others, the at times volatile people-to-people relations that both sides concurred had to be curtailed through continuous engagements not only with their governments but also political parties.

Muhyiddin, who arrived yesterday, had back-to-back meetings, starting with Indonesian Vice-President Boediono. He then had meetings with Anas Urbaningrum, Aburizal Bakrie and Megawati Soekarnoputeri, leaders of Democrat, Golkar and Democratic Party of Struggle parties.

The Umno deputy president said there was renewed vigour by the leaders, who pledged to ensure that their bilateral relations with Umno and the Malaysian government were strengthened and that efforts were made to prevent threats against Malaysia in the future.

"We thanked Indonesia for their assurance that they would prevent attacks on the Malaysian embassy and Malaysia Hall."

Describing his meetings as fruitful, Muhyiddin said during in his meeting with Boediono, he made clear Kuala Lumpur's position on the Tor Tor dance and Gordang Sambilan issue, that their registration under the National Heritage Act was solely with the purpose of preserving the heritage and not to stake a claim on them.

"We did not make a claim. What the ministry did was for their long-term conservation and preservation.

"The move (to register them) also serves to benefit Indonesia as if no such effort is made, cultural elements like these could disappear with time as what has happened to many cultures."

The stand made, he said, was accepted by the leaders he met.

Muhyiddin said the leaders also welcomed the many ideas to strengthen bilateral relations.

They included setting up a caucus group at the Parliament level to address issues of mutual interest, including on culture, politics, economy and people relations.

Muhyiddin said he also discussed with Boediono the "standard operating procedure" on the issue of fishermen from both countries being arrested for unintentional encroachment of seas.

He proposed to revert to the previous understanding that the fishermen be merely sent home.

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