

Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines Reach Accord on Securing Maritime Safety

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JOGJAKARTA, May 5 (Bernama) -- Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines Thursday reached agreement at a special meeting here to conduct joint patrols in their maritime zones in the wake of increasing abductions by armed groups in these waters.

The three nations also agreed to:

- * extend immediate aid to people and vessels in distress,
- * establish a national focal point among the three countries to share information and intelligence in the event of emergency and security threats, and
- * set up a hotline of communication among the three countries to better facilitate coordination during emergency situations and security threats.

Malaysia was represented at the meeting by Foreign Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman, Chief of Defence Forces Tan Sri Zulkifeli Mohd Zin and several senior Foreign Affairs Ministry officials.

Indonesia was represented by Foreign Affairs Minister Retno Marsudi and National Armed Forces commander-in-chief Gatot Nurmantyo while the Philippines was represented by Foreign Affairs Secretary Jose Rene D. Amendras and Acting Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Caesar C. Taccad.

Anifah said that at the closed-door meeting the three countries discussed details of several matters, including the recent abduction of Indonesian and Malaysian nationals in these waters.

"We looked for the best ways to address the problem. The armed forces of the three countries will have further discussions on the matter," he told reporters after the meeting.

Anifah said it was hoped that the close cooperation among the three countries in ensuring security in their maritime zones would address the problem of abductions immediately and effectively.

"We discussed not only short-term measures but also long-term initiatives," he said.

He said the three countries would have to take immediate steps to implement the points of the agreement and the senior officials would meet soon to draw up the standard operating procedure.

Malaysia, he said, shared its experience of maintaining security in the Strait of Melaka to help step up security in the maritime zones of common concern.

On April 1, four Malaysian crew of a tugboard were abducted by armed men in the waters of Ligitan Island near Semporna in Sabah.

On March 26, ten Indonesian crew of a tugboat returning from the Philippines were abducted by an armed group.

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