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A new era for defence diplomacy



Defence Minister Mohamad Sabu with his Indonesian counterpart Prabowo Subianto.

LETTERS: LAST week, I had the opportunity to pay a return visit to my counterpart, Prabowo Subianto, Defence Minister of the Republic of Indonesia.

Prabowo had paid a courtesy call on me the previous year; his first international visit immediately after his appointment by President Joko Widodo in October last year.

In the spirit of continued friendship, I led the delegation from the Defence Ministry to meet him and discuss several issues that are of interest to both countries.

As a gesture to illustrate the deep defence ties between our countries, I flew to Jakarta on an Indonesian-built Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) CN-235.

Several matters were discussed between the Malaysian and Indonesian delegations in the spirit of cordiality, mutual respect and understanding.

Among the issues raised were measures to improve the security at the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas, including the east coast of Sabah.

Both sides expressed their confidence in the effective implementation of the Trilateral Cooperative Arrangement (TCA) between Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines in addressing the common maritime security threats in waters bordering the littoral states.

I emphasised on the Malaysian Armed Forces' (MAF) commitment in securing the area.

Prabowo and I agreed to meet with Delfin Lorenzana, the Secretary of National Defence of the Philippines in February to further discuss efforts on strengthening the TCA.

The meeting discussed how Malaysia and Indonesia can work more closely to develop defence industry cooperation.

As it stands, there are established collaborations between Malaysia and Indonesia in the defence industry. However, I believe we can further consolidate these efforts for our mutual benefit.

For instance, Malaysia has defence companies that are capable in conducting maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) operations on US-made Hercules C-130 and is now able to conduct MRO for the Russian Sukhoi SU-30 presently in service with the Indonesian Air Force.

The Indonesian defence industry, on the other hand, is rapidly developing its naval and aviation production capabilities. It will be a loss for both countries if these resources and expertise are not capitalised to our benefit.

The meeting also agreed that further deliberation on this matter be held in the near future to strengthen cooperation between both countries' defence industry.

We also touched on matters pertaining to the 42nd Malaysia-Indonesia General Border Committee (GBC) scheduled around September or October in Malaysia.

The GBC meeting is an annual consultation between the defence ministers of both countries and it was previously held in Bali, Indonesia.

Before the meeting concluded, I extended an invitation to Prabowo and the Indonesian Defence Ministry to participate in the upcoming Defence Services Asia Exhibition and Conference (DSA 2020) and the National Security Asia 2020 (NATSEC 2020) which will be held in Kuala Lumpur from April 20 to 23.

It is hoped that the defence diplomacy between Malaysia and Indonesia will be enhanced to a greater level in the future, all at once benefiting both Southeast Asian countries.

MOHAMAD SABU

Defence Minister