



Indonesia

News and Views

DOMESTIC ISSUES

Political Issues

Economic Issues

Socio - Cultural Issues

ENVIRONMENT ISSUES

REGIONAL/
INTERNATIONAL ISSUES



USEFUL LINKS:

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(www.deplu.go.id)

Department of Cultural and
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National Agency for
Export Development
(www.nafed.go.id)

Investment
Coordinating Board
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Statistics Indonesia
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The Jakarta Post
(www.thejakartapost.com)

Tongkonan House

Tana Toraja Kindred House, South Sulawesi

Tongkonan is Tana Toraja adat (custom) house which derived from the Toraja word tongkon, which means 'to sit down'. Many house carving designs are derived from plant and animal motifs which connected to the desired wealth and abundance. Historically, only the nobility has the right to build these elaborate and beautifully carved *tongkonan*. The orientation of the tongkonans has cosmological connotations. The design of the carved decorations on the front is decorated with stylized buffalo head has symbolic significance since it contains a variety of messages about social hierarchy and structure, and the relations to the world of the spirits.

Tana Toraja, which is one of the most splendid areas in Indonesia, is located along the coast for about 130 km from Makassar or Ujung Pandang, capital city of South Sulawesi province.

source: www.toraja.net

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DOMESTIC ISSUES

Political Issues

Myanmar Appreciates RI's Humanitarian Assistance

Jakarta - The Myanmar government has expressed its appreciation and thanks to Indonesia for providing humanitarian assistance for victims of Cyclone Nargis which paralyzed Myanmar last Saturday (3/5).

"We really appreciate the contribution made by the Indonesian government for cyclone victims in our country," Charge d'Affaires at the Myanmar Embassy in Jakarta Kyi Maung On said here Thursday (8/5).

Speaking after a function to mark the handing of the humanitarian assistance for the cyclone victims at Halim Perdana Kusuma air base, he said Indonesia and Myanmar were two countries committed to mutual assistance, especially in difficult situations or disasters like what had happened in Myanmar recently.

Indonesia sent humanitarian assistance for the victims of the cyclone that hit Myanmar on Saturday (3/5).

According to the People's Welfare Coordinating Ministry, the humanitarian assistance Indonesia had dispatched to Myanmar consisted of such things as clothes (3,325 tons), biscuit (150 bags), blankets (8,070 tons), sarongs (5,000 pieces) and scores of tents.

The Health Ministry had contributed 13,440 tons of medicines, milk (774 bags) and instant noodle (400 bags) with a total weight of about 24,835 tons.

All the assistance packages were transported from the Halim Perdanakusuma airbase to Myanmar by C-130 Hercules aircraft.

The ceremony marking the despatch of the humanitarian assistance to

Myanmar was led by Social Affairs Minister Bachtiar Chamsyah.

Cyclone Nargis which attacked Myanmar last Saturday had a speed of about 190 km per hour. Tens of thousands of people were reported killed and injured in the disaster.(ANTARA)

Attempt on Horta's Life Not Linked to RI Government, Military: Timor Leste Minister

Malang, E Java - Timor Leste Defense Minister Julio Thomas Pinto said the attempt on President Ramos Horta's life last February was in no way linked to the Indonesian government or National Defense Forces (TNI).

"We hope President Ramos Horta's statement linking the recent attempt on his life with (Metro TV journalist) Desi Anwar will not lead to sensational polemics much less to a disruption in Indonesia-Timor Leste relations," he said.

Speaking to reporters after giving a lecture at Muhammadiyah University (Unmuh) here Saturday (26/4), Pinto said a Timor Leste delegation led by Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao which would arrive in Indonesia on Monday (28/4) for talks with the Indonesian government would also deal with and settle the matter.

Pinto who is a graduate from Unmuh said it would be better for the two countries to conduct a joint investigation into the matter so that its results would be shared by the two sides and the problem could be resolved without disturbing the existing good bilateral relations.

But it should be understood that the Timor Leste government had already assigned its prosecutor general to investigate the attack on Horta by a group of army deserters led by Alfredo Reinado, he said.

He hoped the "trivial" issue that had become an irritant in the cordial relations between the two countries could be settled amicably without having to take it to a court of law. (ANTARA)

Peace Process in Aceh Encouraging: Finnish Ex-President

Banda Aceh - The peace process in Aceh based on the agreement signed by the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Helsinki almost three years ago is already running in a good and encouraging way, former Finnish President Martti Ahtasaari said here on Monday (5/5).

"Although a few acts of violence have happened, they have not disturbed the peace process in Aceh as they were essentially the acts of criminals," Ahtasaari told newsmen here.

Ahtasaari, who in 2005 headed an organization that brokered talks between the government and GAM to end their decades-old armed conflict in Aceh, said his three-day visit (from Sunday (4/5) to Tuesday (6/5)) in Aceh was intended to get first-hand information on developments in the peace process provided for in the Helsinki agreement signed on August 15, 2005.

The former Finnish leader noted the "Atu Lintang" case in which five Aceh Transition Committee (KPA) members were killed in Central Aceh had not disturbed the peace process in the province.

Meanwhile, United States Ambassador to Indonesia Cameron Hume, during his visit here last Friday, said conditions in the province had become more peaceful, almost three years after the government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) signed their peace agreement in Helsinki.

"Aceh is getting more peaceful and I am optimistic the situation in the province will get even better in the days

ahead," Hume said in his comments on the present situation in Aceh.

The US envoy made the statement after a meeting with Commission on Sustaining Peace in Aceh (CoSPA) chairman Azwar Abubakar to discuss the peace process in the province.

The meeting was held at the residence of Abubakar, a former Aceh governor, on Jalan Sudirman in Banda Aceh.

Hume said Aceh was moving towards a better future because of its democratically-elected governor, its improved political system, abundant resources and budget.

He said the situation in Aceh had changed significantly and therefore it would be easier for the local people to make progress.

Asked to comment on the fact that since the signing of the Helsinki peace accord criminal activity with the use of fire arms had increased in Aceh, Hume simply said the perpetrators should be sent to prison.

Hume said people in Aceh should no longer resort to any kind of violence and everyone should be encouraged to uphold the existing laws and shun armed conflict.(ANTARA)

RI to Deploy 140-Member Formed Police Unit to Conflict-Torn Darfur Soon

Indonesia is sending an advance team from its Formed Police Unit (FPU) to the troubled region of Darfur in Sudan this week as part of its plan to deploy its first police peacekeeping unit. The FPU will be part of the African Union and UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). The Jakarta Post's **Veeramalla Anjaiah** spoke to the Foreign Ministry's director for international security and disarmament affairs **Desra Percaya** recently about the UN mission. The following are excerpts from the interview.

Question: *What is Indonesia's stand on the Darfur issue?*

Answer: Indonesia is closely following the situation in Darfur, and expresses its deep concern over the humanitarian situation in Darfur caused by the ongoing conflict. Indonesia calls on all parties to help ensure the full, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to all those in need in the affected region.

Indonesia recognizes the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sudan over the territory of Darfur. In this regard, Indonesia fully supports efforts to find lasting peace in the region, including the implementation of the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement. Indonesia also rejects sanctions as it would only bring unintended and unnecessary consequences.

Indonesia welcomes and fully supports the adoption of the UN Resolution 1769 (2007), which established the African Union and United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID).

However, Indonesia believes that peacekeeping alone is not enough, and it must be accompanied by inclusive dialogue and a political process. Indonesia emphasizes the need for all parties to continue the dialogue process to find common ground.

Could you tell us about Indonesia's plan to join the UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur?

Indonesia's participation in the UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur is part of its longstanding and irrevocable commitment to Africa that can be traced back to the Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung in 1955. Indeed, Indonesia has been actively involved in UN peacekeeping operations in the continent; in the Congo in 1960, and currently in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone and Somalia.

If I may recall, through Resolution 1769 the UN Security Council

established a UN peacekeeping mission in the Darfur region, known as the AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). This resolution stated clearly that UNAMID would consist of up to 19,555 military personnel, up to 3,772 police personnel, and 19 formed police units (FPUs) comprising up to 140 personnel each.

For its part, Indonesia has pledged to send an FPU to join UNAMID. This commitment was reiterated at the highest political level by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in his statement before the UN Security Council on Sept. 25, 2007.

Having completed the domestic administrative requirement as well as the UN pre-deployment inspection, the Indonesian FPU is now being deployed. On a number of occasions, the Sudanese government has expressed its appreciation of Indonesia's participation.

Why is Indonesia sending its police force?

Let me explain first how the selection process in the United Nations was undertaken. After studying the needs of UNAMID, a number of pledges were received from all troops and police of the contributing countries, including Indonesia. It would only be followed up after the consent of the host country (Sudan) has been received.

Indeed, the composition of troops and police from contributing countries is very African in character. African countries will be given priority in the selection process. Initially, Indonesia pledged to contribute not only a formed police unit but also mechanized troops for UNAMID. Taking into account pledges from other countries, the United Nations finally decided to only accept Indonesia's pledge for a formed police unit. While appreciating Indonesia's readiness to participate in Darfur, the United Nations keeps the door open for Indonesia to be involved in future deployment.

How big is the Indonesian contingent and when it will depart for Darfur?

The Indonesian FPU contingent will consist of 140 police personnel. It was confirmed during the pre-deployment visit to Jakarta by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UN-DPKO) last February.

Its logistics and equipment was dispatched to Sudan on April 28. The advance team was scheduled to travel to Sudan on Tuesday (May 13), and the main body of the Indonesian FPU will leave for Darfur on May 25. If things are on the right track, we believe that the entire FPU will be completely deployed in the region by the end of May 2008.

What will be its main mission?

As part of UNAMID, the mandate of the Indonesian FPU is clearly defined in resolution 1769. This includes, but is not limited to, the protection of civilians; the facilitation of full humanitarian access and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes; and to contribute to the restoration of security in Darfur, inter alia, through the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement (signed on May 5, 2006 in Abuja).

In order to achieve these broad goals laid out in resolution 1769, the operation is mandated to carry out a number of tasks falling under four categories: (a) support for the peace process and good offices; (b) security; (c) the rule of law, governance, and human rights; and (d) humanitarian assistance. In this context, the Indonesian FPU will be deployed in Nyala (in south Darfur).

As a responsible UN member, Indonesia has been active in international peacekeeping operations for many years. Could you throw some light on the current presence of Indonesian forces in UN peacekeeping missions?

Indonesia has participated in 24 UN peacekeeping missions across the world. Indonesia was first involved in the

UN Emergency Forces mission in Sinai in 1956. (The Jakarta Post)

Economic Issues

Indonesia Expo in Warsaw Clinches \$349,000 in Transactions

Warsaw - The Indonesia Expo which was held in Warsaw, Poland, on May 7-10 clinched at least US\$349,000 in transactions.

The figure excluded transactions made at the conclusion of the four-day expo, Indonesian Ambassador to Poland Hazairin Pohan said in a press conference on Saturday (10/5) evening.

He said US\$63,000 of the transactions were made on the first day of the expo, US\$170,000 on the second day and US\$116,000 on the third day.

He said 141 companies including 97 Polish companies signed business deals with their Indonesian counterparts during the expo.

Also present at the press conference were Indonesian Ambassador to Hungary, Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Macedonia Mangasi Sihombing, Indonesian Ambassador to Serbia M. Abduh Dalimunthe, Director of the Indonesian Trade and Promotion Center (ITPC) in Budapest Muchlis Sjahminan and Chief of the National Board for Placement and Protection of Migrant Indonesian Workers (BNP2TKI) Jumhur Hidayat.

Director of the ITPC in Budapest Muchlis Sjahminan said the expo was very extraordinary because it was held at the initiative of the Indonesian representatives abroad.

So far, such an initiative had come from domestic institutions, he said.

The Indonesian expo held at the initiative of the Indonesian ambassador to Poland served as a common movement involving Indonesian representatives abroad, particularly

those based in eastern and western European countries, he said.

He said Indonesian furniture was in great demand at the expo, followed by cocoa and essential oils and jewelry. (ANTARA)

Iran Signs Up for More Trade with RI

Iran, which has just signed two large project deals with Indonesia, aims to soon take up around 1 percent of Indonesia's annual international trade value, says the Iranian ambassador for the country.

"Currently, the trade value between Indonesia and Iran stands at around US\$500 million, still a quarter from our target," Behrooz Kamalvandi said, as quoted by Antara.

Last year, trade relations between the two countries reached \$553.1 million, a 37 percent increase from the \$404.4 million recorded in the previous year, according to the Trade Ministry.

Kamalvandi added the country was on its way to achieving the target.

"Iran and Indonesia have signed deals on two large projects. First is a refinery in Banten with a total investment of \$6 billion and the second is the construction of a fertilizer factory, known as the Hengam project, in southern Iran, with a total investment of \$700 million," he said.

For the refinery project, scheduled for completion in 2012, Iran will provide around 150,000 to 180,000 barrels of oil per day, equal to 12-14 percent of Indonesia's total oil demand, Kamalvandi said.

"Some of the fuel produced from the refinery will be exported to Iran with the value of about \$2 billion annually."

Indonesia and Iran will each finance 40 percent of the refinery project and the remainder 20 percent will come from Malaysia.

As for the fertilizer plant, Iran will export about 1 million tons of fertilizer to Indonesia.

The two projects are estimated to produce 2,500 tons of urea and ammonia per month.

"Indonesia and Iran still have potential in sectors which have not been explored yet. We will keep trying to find ways so big project deals can be made in order to maximize this potential," Kamalvandi said. (The Jakarta Post)

Socio - Cultural Issues

Gates Offers Free Software to Indonesian Students

Gate to High Tech: President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono meets with Microsoft founder Bill Gates in Jakarta on Thursday (8/5). During his two-day visit, Gates is scheduled to attend the Asian Government Leaders Forum 2008 and to speak at a presidential lecture in Jakarta on Friday (9/5). Microsoft founder Bill Gates said on Thursday he would help Indonesian students obtain free software and inexpensive personal computers to gain greater access to the Internet.

During a meeting here with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Gates, one of the world's richest men, expressed his commitment to supporting the government's efforts to improve education quality by providing Internet-based national education.

"He (Gates) told the President that Microsoft will continue to train teachers and students throughout Indonesia in software, computer and information and communication technology," Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Aburizal Bakrie told a press briefing after the meeting.

Yudhoyono told Gates that Indonesia and Microsoft should continue to work together as the cooperation would mutually benefit both parties.

The government is seeking to obtain software from Microsoft for a million computers for educational purposes in an effort to cut the ratio of computers to students from the current 1:1000 to 1:20, Aburizal said.

Gates said he was ready to help Indonesia get high-quality personal computers for a price of less than US\$200 per unit, plus free software if Indonesia could make a deal with Intel chairman Craig Barrett, who will meet Yudhoyono in Jakarta next week.

"We will make a deal with Barrett to acquire cheap or even free processors for the computers to be distributed to the students. As a result, we will get a much lower price than \$200," minister of communication and information Muhammad Nuh said.

He expressed optimism that Indonesia could strike a deal with Barrett, who is known as a leading advocate for education improvement in the United States and around the world, and a vocal spokesman for the value of technology.

Gates also praised Indonesia's progress in fighting software piracy, pointing to fact the country had moved out from a priority ranking on a world piracy watch list.

"Gates' visit shows that he trusts we are making progress in fighting piracy. We are now checking government offices and big businesses to make sure they don't use pirated software. We want to get out from the watch list as soon as possible," Nuh said.

Indonesia ranks as the fourth-worst offender of software piracy in the Asia Pacific after Vietnam, Pakistan and China.

Gates also expressed commitment to expanding the Microsoft Innovation Center program, which now runs at the University of Indonesia, the Bandung Institute of Technology, Gadjah Mada University and the Surabaya Institute of Technology. The center helps students conduct research in the information technology field.

Gates is in Indonesia as a key speaker at the presidential lecture to be held as part of Microsoft's annual Government Leadership Forum, which started Thursday. He will address about 1,500 government officials and business representatives and 1,000 students on Friday. (The Jakarta Post)

Unicef Builds Hundreds of Tsunami-Stricken Elementary Schools in Aceh and Nias

Banda Aceh - The United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) is building hundreds of elementary school buildings which had been destroyed by the tsunami in Aceh and Nias.

"A total of 102 school buildings had been completed by Unicef out of a total of 346 units the UN agency planned to rebuilt," Head of the Banda Aceh Unicef Office Ingrid Kolb Hindarmanto said here on Monday (5/5).

Ingrid said Unicef is implementing its program in Aceh and Nias in the 2005-2010 period, and the UN agency still have time to complete the other schools.

The schools built by Unicef are quake-resistant and may last for 30 years.

To build one such school, Unicef allocated 250 thousand US dollars, so that it would cost 86.5 million US dollars to complete the entire program.

In the meantime, Unicef is also meeting its commitment to build integrated mother and child health centers (Posyandu) complete with several facilities including a playground and dormitories for their paramedics and nurses.

But so far only 10 Posyandus had been completed, while the remaining 76 are still under construction as well as being tendered to contractors.

Ingrid said the rather slow construction of the posyandus was mainly caused by land procurement problems.(ANTARA)

ENVIRONMENT ISSUES

PMI Holds Environment Campaigns in Banda Aceh

Banda Aceh - The Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) in cooperation with the International Red Cross is holding environment campaigns in Banda Aceh as part of efforts to mitigate the risk of natural disasters.

"Through the campaigns, we would like to remind the public of the importance of conserving the environment for our life to mitigate the risk of natural disasters," the chief of the PMI's branch in Aceh, Bustari Mansyur, said on Sunday (11/5).

He made the remarks after holding a series of activities, such as fun walk, children's competitions, blood donation and first aid to mark the anniversary of the International Red Cross. The activities held from May 8 to 11 were aimed at making the public aware of the tasks of the red cross which serves all mankind, regardless of race, nationality and skin color.

Almost all red cross organizations from various countries had expressed support for the success of the post-tsunami environment campaigns and

humanitarian activities, he said. (ANTARA)

REGIONAL/INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Global Journalists Meet in Bali

For the third time, the Norwegian and Indonesian governments are holding a meeting of journalist leaders and editors.

Norway Deputy Minister of Culture and Church affairs Wegard Harsvik and Indonesia's Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda are slated to open the third Global Inter-Media Dialog (GIMD) here Wednesday (7/5).

The forum address numerous topics including the changing media landscape, covering conflict, reporting minorities and challenges in reporting global issues.

Among the speakers are Aidan White of the International Federation of Journalists, Robin Lustic of the BBC, Victor Merina of University of California and Greg Sheridan of the *Australian* newspaper.

Around 130 journalists from more than 60 countries are expected to attend the two-day forum (from 7 to 8 May 2008).

The Norwegian and Indonesian governments initiated the dialogue in 2006 to find an answer to what role the media should play in an increasingly shrinking and multicultural world. Although the two governments provide financial and administrative support, the forum is left to journalists to run.

The publication of Danish cartoons satirizing Prophet Muhammad in September 2005 helped spur the dialogue. The cartoon controversy provoked violent outbursts in a number of countries, with more than 100 people killed.

GMID aims at bridging the gap between different religions, cultures and people.

The first dialogue tackled the issues of freedom of expression and globalization. It was held in Bali in September 2006 and was opened by Norway Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

The dialogue was themed Freedom of Expression and Diversity: The Media in a Multicultural World.

The second dialogue offered a chance for an open and honest debate and let media representatives express their visions and frustrations. The dialogue, held in Oslo in June 2007, was themed Primetime for Diversity-Journalism in a Troubled World.

This year's dialogue is themed Ethical Journalism in Extreme Conditions: The Challenge of Diversity.

Norway and Indonesia have held political consultations, annual meetings, dialogues and activities on human rights since 2002. (The Jakarta Post)

World Mass Media Have Credibility: Minister

Denpasar, Bali - Foreign Affairs Minister Hassan Wirayuda said the mass media of the world had the credibility to rally and to inspire diverse communities, organizations, groups and individuals to take collective and concerted action for good causes and for good fights.

Wirayuda made the statement at the opening of the third Global Inter-Media Dialog in Nusa Dua, Bali, on Wednesday (7/5).

"I believe in the power of mass media not only to draw focus on issues but also to educate, to enlighten and to unite perceptions," Wirayuda said, adding that he believed the capacity of mass media was to enable their audiences.

Commenting on the global inter-media dialog, Wirayuda said the dialog and consultation should lead to goodwill and cooperation.

"When goodwill is robust and cooperation has become a habit, they will lead to a sense of responsibility to and for one another," he said.

"I like to think that you are carrying out this Dialog, and the Governments of Norway and Indonesia are supporting and facilitating it so that one day within our lifetime ours will be a decidedly better world," he added.

Wirayuda said the better world would come about when all people had learned to accept and appreciate the immense variety of the human race.

"And we all have learned to exercise our rights and freedoms, including the right of free expression, while still caring for the feelings and sensitivities of others," he said.

Wirayuda was of the opinion that the Dialog in Bali was one of the first steps in a mission well beyond the CNN effect toward the shaping of a global community that could solve its systemic problems.

On the occasion, Wirayuda said freedom of expression and freedom of the press were the first civic freedoms that had been restored in Indonesia when the country's democratic transition was launched. (ANTARA)

US and ASEAN Trade Ministers to Discuss Market Opening Efforts

US Trade Representative Susan Schwab said Monday (28/4) she would meet Southeast Asian counterparts to review progress of a trade and investment initiative and the Doha Round of global trade talks.

The meeting on the US-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Trade and Investment Framework Arrangement (TIFA) will be held in Bali, Indonesia from May 1 to 4

as a follow up to talks held in November, Schwab's office said in a statement.

The United States inked the TIFA in August 2006 with the 10-member ASEAN in a deal seen as a precursor to a full free-trade agreement.

Under the TIFA, the United States and ASEAN would have a formal ministerial dialogue aimed at expanding trade and investment.

"Building on our TIFA talks in November, we will take stock of the progress we have made with our ASEAN partners and lay the groundwork for our joint efforts going forward," Schwab told AFP.

"We will also discuss how best to maximize the prospects of a near-term breakthrough in the Doha Round negotiations," she added.

Trade between the United States and ASEAN, which comprises Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, has grown significantly during the past decade.

ASEAN was the fifth largest export market for the United States in 2007, with US exports totaling 61 billion dollars, according to the statement.

In addition, US foreign direct investment in ASEAN countries reached 99 billion dollars in 2006, up 13 percent from the previous year, according to latest available US data.

The statement said Schwab would meet with the ASEAN ministers as well as her counterparts from Australia and New Zealand to help achieve a "successful market-opening outcome" on the WTO negotiations.

The WTO's Doha round of talks to reduce trade barriers was launched in the Qatari capital in November 2001 with the aim of reaching a deal by 2004, but has foundered ever since, principally in disputes between developed and developing countries on agricultural subsidies and industrial tariffs.(ANTARA)

Trade Ministers Committed to Concluding ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement

Jakarta - Australian Trade Minister Simon Crean has welcomed the strong commitment expressed by ministers to conclude the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA) negotiations at their next meeting in August in Singapore.

The ASEAN Economic Ministers - Closer Economic Relations (AEM-CER) consultations were held in Bali, Indonesia, on 3 May.

At the meeting, ministers recognized the progress made in recent negotiating rounds with only a handful of issues now requiring resolution.

"Encouragingly, ministers did not identify any issue as being beyond resolution", Crean said in an Australian Embassy media release.

"It is important that negotiations deliver commercially meaningful improvements in market access for goods, services and investment," he said.

"We are aiming for a high quality outcome that will also genuinely enhance our regional and multilateral trade and economic objectives," he added.

Crean said that it was clear that tough negotiations still lie ahead.

"The negotiations are challenging. We are dealing with a group of diverse countries ranging in different levels of development but importantly we all agree on the importance of successfully concluding the FTA negotiation in August," he said.

"Considerable work remains. But ministers have given a clear signal to officials that the political will is there to try and achieve a substantial outcome this year," he added.

The AEM-CER consultations involved ministers from the 10 ASEAN countries with the Trade Ministers from

Australia and New Zealand (the parties to the CER Agreement).

In Bali, Crean also discussed in detail with his ministerial colleagues, including US Trade Representative Susan Schwab and Indian Commerce Minister Kamal Nath, progress on the Doha Development Round.

"We are now in the final stages of the Doha negotiations. Challenges still remain. But the fact that countries are genuinely seeking to resolve these difficulties indicates their willingness to conclude the round this year," Crean said.(ANTARA)

ASEAN Sending Emergency Rapid Assessment Team to Myanmar

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is set to send an emergency rapid assessment team (ERAT) to cyclone-devastated Myanmar to assist the local government in overcoming the impact of the natural disaster.

The team, which will comprise experts with specific knowledge in coordination and liaison, water and sanitation, health, logistics and food, was formed by the ASEAN Secretariat in coordination with the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM) and the Myanmar government, the ASEAN Secretariat said in a statement made available on Tuesday (13/5).

ERAT will be deployed in Yangon to complement the current rapid assessment efforts by the ASEAN Secretariat, the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination team and the Myanmar government, it said.

The team will depart for Myanmar within 48 hours.

"Following ERAT's assessment, the teams from the ASEAN member states will be deployed to Myanmar to provide targeted assistance which supports the capacity of the Government of Myanmar to implement useful and effective aid

distribution to the affected population," ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan said. (The Jakarta Post)

Australia and Indonesia Coordinate Patrols to Target Illegal Fishing

Jakarta - Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, Bill Farmer, has described the latest coordinated patrols by Australian and Indonesian authorities as 'concrete evidence' of the seriousness with which both countries were addressing the threat of illegal fishing in the region, according to a press statement of the Australian embassy in Jakarta.

Australia's Minister for Home Affairs, Bob Debus, announced that vessels from the Australian Customs Service and the Indonesian Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries have completed a two-week operation (11-25 April) of coordinated patrols targeting illegal fishing in the Arafura Sea north-east of Darwin.

The Australian Customs Vessel Triton and Indonesian Fisheries Vessels Hiu Macan 003 and Hiu Macan 004 patrolled their respective Exclusive Economic Zones in this area, with the Indonesian vessels also visiting an Australian port for the first time.

Indonesia's Minister for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs Freddy Numberi said, "Our respective maritime zones should be seen as a common resource and both sides are equally responsible for their wise and sustainable use."

"We are all committed to the fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing practices in our region. This solid cooperation between Australia and Indonesia is very important in establishing coordinated patrols targeting illegal fishing vessels entering Indonesian waters or at the border area between the two countries," Vice-Admiral (ret) Numberi said.

"A dynamic goal of the coordinated patrols is to increase the number of operations annually and to develop a Regional Monitoring Database (RMD) that can be shared between our two respective countries to serve as the back bone for implementing Fisheries Management Policies (FMP) against IUU Fishing," Minister Numberi said.

Debus said the operation, which was co-ordinated by Australia's Border Protection Command and included daily aerial surveillance by Coastwatch and RAAF AP-3C Orion aircraft, was the second co-ordinated patrol involving both Australian and Indonesian vessels.

"While no illegal activity was detected by Australian or Indonesian patrol boats, a number of investigative boardings were undertaken in both Australian and Indonesian waters," Debus said.

Debus said illegal fishing was an international problem threatening worldwide fish stocks, the marine environment and the border security of all nations in the region.

"The aim of this patrol was to work with Indonesia to detect board and apprehend any suspected illegal, unlicensed or unreported fishing boats in Australian and Indonesian waters."

"It also allowed us to test further communication and operational protocols between Australian and Indonesian patrol boats and surveillance aircraft. These protocols will ensure a more effective response to illegal activities within our respective maritime zones," Debus said.

"International co-operation is the key to responding effectively to the illegal fishing problem and I would particularly like to thank the Indonesian Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, and the crews of the patrol vessels, for their support of this patrol activity," Debus said. (ANTARA)