

Indonesia offers economic cooperation to resolve South China Sea dispute

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On the frontline -- President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo (center), accompanied by Navy chief of staff Adm. Ade Supandi (left) and other senior officials, inspect the warship KRI Imam Bonjol 383 after a Cabinet meeting onboard in the Natuna waters, Riau Islands, on June 23. Of late, Chinese fishing vessels have, on several times, encroached into Indonesia's Natuna waters to catch fish illegally. (Courtesy Setpres/Krishadiyanto)

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2

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The government sees the potential of economic cooperation between Asian countries as a possible avenue to resolve territorial disputes in the South China Sea, a minister has said.

"The government is deliberating for the chance to realize joint-ventures with China or Taiwan, or with any other [claimant] states," Coordinating Minister for Politics, Legal and Security Affairs Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan told journalists on Thursday.

With no details yet on the cooperation, however, he cited an example of a plan to accommodate other countries in fish canning production in Indonesia as part of the cooperation. Indonesia is not a claimant state in the South China Sea but is looking to have a bigger role in resolving the ongoing dispute.

Still, the government would not compromise its regional integrity with any claimant state of the disputed seas to forge further cooperation.

The idea came up on the heels of a recent spat with the Chinese government in Indonesia's exclusive economic zone in Natuna waters off the Riau Islands province, which overlaps with China's claimed "nine-dash line" quasi-territorial border, spanning 2,000 kilometers away from its mainland.

President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo visited Natuna on June 23 and held a meeting on board a warship to send a stern message to China that Indonesia is "very serious in protecting its sovereignty". (rin)

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