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Indonesia, Afghanistan bolster bilateral relations

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Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai held bilateral talks in Bali, reaffirmed the long-standing bonds of friendship between the two nations, expressed their commitment to promote bilateral cooperation in all areas of mutual benefit, local media reported on Saturday.

During bilateral talks on the sidelines of the fifth Bali Democracy Forum (BDF) in Nusa Dua, Bali, Yudhoyono expressed Indonesia's commitment to support Afghanistan in various fields, including technical vocational training, infrastructure, as well as in women's empowerment, higher education and mid-career diplomat training.

"We have asked relevant ministries to identify and work on concrete programs" President Yudhoyono said after the meeting with President Karzai.

The two countries welcomed the new treaty of friendship and cooperation to replace the previous friendship treaty, which concluded on April 24, 1955. The new treaty promotes political cooperation, economic and trade cooperation, in addition to academic and cultural cooperation.

Karzai underlined the positive economic prospects of his country and invited Indonesia to explore the possibility of direct trade and investment in Afghanistan.

"Indonesian businesses are welcomed to Afghanistan to participate in the development of Afghanistan and in the expansion of business between two countries," Afghan President Karzai said.

The value of two-way trade between the two countries stood at 37.78 million US dollars as of August this year.

Both leaders welcomed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) on Capacity Building for Law Enforcement Personnel, signed last September in Jakarta.

The MoU stipulates that Indonesian National Police will train 50 Afghanistan National Police officers on traffic management, police community services and crime investigation. Both leaders instructed the training to commence as soon as possible.

To promote good governance, the meeting encouraged closer cooperation between the corruption eradication agencies of the two countries. Both leaders also underlined the importance of promoting bilateral cooperation on counterterrorism and transnational organized crimes as well as a commitment to combating people smuggling and trafficking, the Jakarta Post reported.

"We will also explore cooperation in the fields of culture through a cultural exchange programs and cultural mission," President Yudhoyono said.

Following the talks, both leaders witnessed the signing of four agreements, respectively on friendship and cooperation, on visa exemption for holders of diplomatic and service passports, on bilateral consultations and on cultural exchange programs.