

MALAYSIAN FISHERMAN TO RETURN HOME

Indonesian authorities set to release detainee seven months ahead of schedule

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ALTHOUGH frail and beset with worries, 82-year-old Guay Noi has been buoyed by news that her son, who is serving a sentence for fishing violations in an Indonesian prison, will be released seven months ahead of schedule.

Guay, of Bagan Sekinchan here, has been worried sick over her fifth child, Chia Kee Chan, 52, who was arrested in February 2016 by Indonesia's fishery authorities for encroaching on the country's waters, along with four other crew members.

In April of the same year, Chia

was sentenced to two years and four months' jail at the Labuhan Deli prison in Medan.

"I have not seen him since he was arrested in 2016. It was during the Chinese New Year celebration. I was devastated because it was supposed to be a happy occasion, but the arrest turned my world upside down," she said.

Chia is set to arrive back home on Thursday — and in spite of her frailty, Guay is insisting on making the over two-hour journey to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) to be the first to see her son.

"Last Friday, I received news that he will be freed seven months ahead of schedule and I am very happy. He was supposed to be released only in August.

"Having him home for Chinese New Year will make it the best celebration ever. I am excited to go to KLIA to receive him.

"My hands are weak and I cannot cook his favourite dishes. My knees are weak too, but they have 'strengthened' upon hearing the good news.

"I have become strong and I will



(From left) Chia Ming Chuan, Guay Noi and Yeo Su Hung look at a picture of Chia Kee Chan, a fisherman who is set to return to Malaysia on Thursday. He is currently serving a sentence in an Indonesian prison for fishing violations. PIC BY FAIZ ANUAR

walk as far as it takes to see him at the airport," Guay added.

At a press conference on Thursday, Sungai Besar MP Budiman Zohdi said Chia's early release was due to an agreement reached between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Indonesian President Joko Widodo to free fishermen serving time in the prisons of each other's nations for territorial encroachment.

The agreement was sealed at the 12th Malaysia-Indonesia Annual Leaders' Consultation in Kuching in November.

Budiman said Chia would be brought to Jakarta from Medan, where he would board a 3.45pm flight to KLIA.

"Chia is expected to arrive at

7pm. I will be bringing along Guay, Chia's wife Yeo Su Hung, 45, and their four children to KLIA to reunite the family," he said.

On a related matter, Budiman, who is also Sungai Panjang assemblyman, said he would raise the case of local fishermen allegedly being targeted and attacked by Indonesian authorities while fishing in Malaysian waters.

"I will highlight this issue in Parliament, as I feel there is a need for a deeper understanding and discussions over territorial waters between both countries in order to avert such cases from happening again," he said.

Meanwhile, Yeo said it was a blessing to finally have her husband home for Chinese New Year,

and that she was preparing to cook *bah kut teh* (herbal pork rib soup) to celebrate his return.

"It has been difficult, the past one year and 10 months. I was only able to see him once — when Budiman brought me to the prison on Dec 14, last year. I was sad to see my husband who had lost weight, but he was in good health.

"We were able to spend an hour catching up, and I learnt that my husband was given the task of working in the prison's kitchen. I thank Budiman, Najib and the Barisan Nasional government for helping my family and me," said Yeo.

She added that she would not stop her husband of 25 years from going out to sea again,