

# PM: Sabah claim will harm ties with Manila

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that it was difficult for Malaysia to maintain full relations with the Philippines as long as its claim over Sabah continued to exist.

The Prime Minister said it was entirely up to the Philippines to settle the issue of its claim to Sabah.

"We cannot do anything here... it's really up to them," he told reporters after launching the Kuala Lumpur City Centre development project at Jalan Lumba Kuda here.

He said this when asked to comment on a statement by Philippine Foreign Secre-

tary Roberto Romulo who reportedly said that his country's Senate was the stumbling block to the Sabah claim issue although its past leaders had wanted the matter settled.

Dr Mahathir said it was an internal matter for the Philippines to resolve.

"If they do not want to drop the claim, what do I have to say? The procedure is there, the consensus is there."

In Manila, Senator Blas Ople, chairman of the Senate foreign relations committee, said the Philippine Senate would oppose any Government move to drop Manila's claim to Sabah un-

less border problems and other pending issues were resolved first.

"Any concessions on Sabah that disregard these requirements will meet with resistance in the Senate," said Romulo.

He was commenting on reports from Kuala Lumpur quoting Romulo as saying Manila was keen to settle the long-running dispute with Malaysia to improve relations between the two neighbours.

The Philippines laid claim to Sabah, on the northern tip of Borneo, in 1962, saying it historically belonged to the Filipino Sultan of Sulu.

"Any new initiative to

drop the Sabah claim will have to take account of the need for adequate understandings concerning our maritime borders and economic zones, the status of 300,000 Filipinos now in Sabah, Customs and border patrol arrangements and, not least, the private claims of the heirs of the Sultan of Sulu," Ople said in a Press statement.

Romulo, who returned on Tuesday from a visit to Kuala Lumpur, said he had told Malaysian leaders the Government would not pursue its territorial claim but could not drop it outright without the approval of the Senate.

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