

Philippine President will continue efforts to find solution, says PM

Sabah issue: Ramos gives an assurance

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By Kamrul Idris
and Saiful
Azhar Abdullah

JITRA, Fri. — Philippine President Fidel Ramos has assured the Malaysian Government that he will keep moving forward to seek a solution to the Sabah issue, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said during their meeting, Ramos agreed to continue with efforts initiated by his predecessor, Corazon Aquino, to drop the Philippine claim on Sabah.

"He will not move backwards on this but forge ahead to find an amicable solution," he told reporters after a *ceramah* at the *Majlis perjumpaan mesra bersama Perdana Menteri* here.

Aquino had initiated moves to drop the claim but her efforts were blocked by the Philippine Senate.

"I do not expect the Sabah issue to be resolved with his visit here," Dr Mahathir said, referring to official talks with the Philippine leader's delegation over the

last two days.

He said the matter did not solely rest with the Philippine government but also involved people in certain areas of that country including those who claimed to be heirs of the Sultan of Sulu who claimed they had proprietary rights to Sabah.

"But as far as we are concerned, Sabah belongs to us," he said.

Asked about the Philippines' move to set up an advisory council on the Sabah claim, Dr Mahathir said: "That is their way of resolving the problem. We will not interfere."

In Kuala Lumpur, Ramos told a Press conference that the outcome of talks during his visit, the first by a Philippine head of state in 25 years, had laid the groundwork for an eventual solution to the Sabah issue.

He said, however, that a settlement of the claim on Sabah by the heirs of the former Sulu Sultan was not imminent.

"The solution will be a long, step-by-step process," the President said at the crowded news conference,

which was attended by a 50-member Philippine Press delegation.

"We shall be moving forward as we improve bilateral relations and strengthen the ties that bind us."

Ramos said new elements had been added to the effort towards a solution. Of these, the economic initiative to speed up the development of the southern Philippines held out the best prospects for success.

"Co-operation in the form of the various economic activities laid before us is the best approach for a solution to the problem," he said.

Malaysia and the Philippines would establish "extension offices", or consular annexes, in Mindanao and Sabah, which was one of the first items on the agenda of the bilateral Joint Commission.

Ramos said the function of the proposed Sabah office of the Philippine Embassy would mainly be to monitor the large Filipino minority

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