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Mahathir-Ramos

MAHATHIR AND RAMOS AGREE TO MEET MORE OFTEN

From Azman Ujang 94 P P

MANILA, Feb 3 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr

Mahathir Mohamad and Philippine President Fidel Ramos have agreed to meet more often to deepen bilateral relations between the two countries, ending 30 years of lukewarm ties caused by Manila's territorial claim on Sabah.

Emerging from talks at the Malacanang Palace here on the first day of Dr Mahathir's four-day official visit, both leaders declared a new era for Kuala Lumpur-Manila ties, saying cool relations had gone on long enough and problems between them should not hold up the establishment of cordial relations, especially to enhance economic development.

In a joint press conference shortly after their meeting, Dr Mahathir praised President Ramos for his initiatives in normalising relations with Malaysia by visiting Malaysia a year ago and which he was now reciprocating.

"The atmosphere now is just right for greater economic cooperation between our two countries and we have agreed to meet more often," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he and President Ramos agreed not only to meet more regularly in each other's country but also at international gatherings where they would make it a point to see each other. -- more

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"This will enable us to renew our acquaintance and friendship to discuss bilateral issues," he said.

Dr Mahathir said very good progress had been achieved towards normalising relations between the two countries not only by the visits he and President Ramos had embarked on, but also between other high-level officials through the Joint Commission set up to bring both countries closer together.

President Ramos said Dr Mahathir's visit gave new impetus to the progressive transformation of Philippine-Malaysia relations and accelerated its momentum.

"It raises Philippine-Malaysia relations to a higher plane. It places those relations on a new level of genuine partnership" said Ramos as Dr Mahathir nodded in agreement.

He said that during the meeting, they agreed to convene as early as possible the Joint Committee on Border Cooperation meeting so as to facilitate and effectively regulate the movements of goods and people across the common sea border. -- more

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It was apparent from their opening remarks at the press conference that both leaders did not discuss the Sabah issue but President Ramos said they talked about the Filipino immigrants in Sabah and Filipino workers in Peninsular Malaysia.

Sabah is home to tens of thousands of Filipinos who fled the southern Philippines from the early 1970's while several thousands are working in peninsular Malaysia, mostly as maids.

Recalling his visit to Malaysia in January last year, he said it was made possible by the "bold and far-sighted" decision of the Malaysian government and Dr Mahathir.

He described the visit as an "historic one in its own way", being the first by a Philippine president in 25 years.

The visit opened a new era in relations as both countries agreed to transcend their differences and build on their natural affinities and common interests which had deep roots in history. -- more

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Before the press conference, the two leaders witnessed the signing of nine Memoranda of Understanding for joint-venture projects worth hundreds of millions of Malaysian ringgit between Malaysian and Philippine companies, underscoring yet another significance of Dr Mahathir's visit.

After the press conference, Dr Mahathir presented a specially-built left-hand drive Proton Wira limousine to President Ramos on the porch of the presidential palace.

President Ramos then drove Dr Mahathir around the palace grounds in the car.

According to Datuk Adzmi Wahab, the managing director of Edaran Otomobil Nasional (EON), the car distributor, it was the first left-hand drive unit to be assembled by Proton, taking into account that the Philippines was a left-hand drive country.

Meanwhile, speaking at an official dinner hosted by President Ramos at the Malacanang Palace tonight, Dr Mahathir cited the Malay proverb: "Tak kenal maka tak cinta" (one will not love if one does not know each other) to describe past relations between the two countries. -- more

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He spoke of his concept of the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) and the need for the consultative forum for countries in the region to be operational as early as possible...

"I wish to reiterate that Malaysia does not envisage the EAEC as an economic bloc. It is never intended to be one in the first place," he added.

Rather, the EAEC would help the less developed countries in East Asia to learn from the experience of the successful ones, as well as initiate cross-border investments to speed up development and technology transfer.

Out of this, the prime minister expected the emergence of what he called an East Asian Crescent of Prosperity which could act as the locomotive of growth for the rest of the world.

Dr Mahathir also welcomed the creation of the East Asean Growth Area (EAGA) which was initiated and being actively promoted by President Ramos.

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EAGA groups Mindanao in southern Philippines, East Malaysia, eastern Indonesia and Brunei.

Among other things, it is envisaged that the EAGA will bring these areas together through direct transportation and communication links, sharing of facilities and joint development of complementary resources and enable unhampered flow of goods, services and people.

He told President Ramos that he had specifically requested the Malaysian private sector to look at the Philippine private sector as a strategic alliance partner whose entrepreneurial skills were as renowned as any.

In a world where the globalisation of industries was moving ahead at a rapid pace, the government had urged the Malaysian private sector to look outward and to invest overseas as well as forge strategic alliances with overseas partners to maintain their competitive edge.

He also said Malaysia was ready to exchange developmental experience with the Philippines while both countries had a lot to learn from each other. -- Bernama

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