

Dr Mahathir and Ramos renew
commitment to work together

KL-Manila pledge on economic co-operation

From
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MANILA, Thurs. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines today reiterated their common desire to intensify economic co-operation in various fields in the belief that further success in these endeavours would provide greater stability in the long run.

Both leaders also renewed their commitment to work closer together for mutual and regional benefits.

A declaration to this effect was made today by the visiting Prime Minister and the Filipino President at a joint Press conference at Malacanang Palace here.

Dr Mahathir, who began a four-day official visit to the Philippines here today, said that the atmosphere was just right for closer co-operation between the two Asean neighbours.

In his opening remarks at the Press conference, he said that leaders from the two countries should visit each other more often so that they could work towards strengthening bilateral friendship.

"We have made very good progress in relations. This visit, and that of Ramos to Malaysia last year, has opened a new phase in our relationship," the Prime Minister said.

"We had certain problems in the past. As a result, we didn't visit each other.

"But we feel that this kind of relationship had gone on long enough. We need to find new ways and measures to improve relations and renew the cordial relationship.

"We have achieved some tangible results."

Dr Mahathir also hoped that the trade imbalance between the two countries could be reduced.

Trade is in Malaysia's favour at the moment, but this is largely due to the Filipino purchase of Malaysian oil.

MORE REPORTS ON PAGE 2

The Prime Minister said reducing the imbalance could be done by having Filipino businessmen staging exhibitions in Malaysia of their goods and services.

"I think there is also good potential in developing more co-operation in the fields of tourism, communications and infrastructural development," Dr Mahathir said.

In his opening remarks at the Press conference, Ramos said there has been a steady improvement in bilateral relations.

Ramos said: "We have seen the progressive transformation of Philippines-Malaysia relations.

"Dr Mahathir's visit gives new impetus to this process of transformation and accelerates its momentum.

"It raises Philippines-Malaysia relations to a higher plane.

"It places the relations on a new level of genuine partnership ... we agreed to extend our areas of co-operation and, accordingly, to consult with each other regularly on global, regional and bilateral issues, at many levels and in many sectors.

"Specifically, we agreed that we ourselves should meet periodically in order to solidify the new partnership between our countries and between us personally.

"I am convinced that this partnership will provide vital and constructive elements for enhancing the security of the Philippines and the prosperity of our people, and become a force for stability and progress in our region."

Asked to state their positions regarding the security arrangement in the region, both leaders said they believed that economic progress and inter-dependence would be key elements in such matters.

Dr Mahathir said that talking to each other and resolving problems through consultation, using avenues

PLEASE TURN TO
PAGE 2, COL 1

How Asean nations can help each other

□ FROM PAGE ONE

such as Asean, would be more meaningful in guaranteeing the security of the region.

"I don't think security problems can be overcome by having big armies and navies. We would rather look at each other as friends, but it is people outside the region who keep harping on security. In Asean, we may have problems, but this had not become an outright conflict."

He said if all countries in the region could work to-

gether and help develop each other's prosperity, then they could help maintain and reinforce stability.

"When everyone has vested interests in each other's prosperity, we can all help improve stability, which is essential for progress. I don't think we need to invite armies or navies from elsewhere to defend us," Dr Mahathir said.

On the same question, Ramos said the stability and prosperity of the region would come from "mutual economic interdependence" more than military alliance,

adding that security could also be enhanced through joint training, exchange of information and research and more frequent meetings between senior officials.

Ramos said he shared Dr Mahathir's sentiment that conflicts were best resolved through peaceful dialogue, which would be the guiding principle in Malaysia-Philippines relations.

Ramos said: "Dr Mahathir and I today reiterated our commitment on the establishment of the East Asean Growth Area (EAGA) among Mindanao, East Ma-

laysia, eastern Indonesia and Brunei.

"We agreed to the early convening of the joint-committee on border co-operation so as to greatly facilitate and regulate effectively the movement of goods and people across our borders.

"We agreed to deepen our co-operation in the judicious development of our aquatic and forest resources and help each other in research and technology in these and other areas of complementary expertise.

"We are determined to cooperate in carrying out the

intent and spirit of the 1992 Manila Declaration on the South China Sea — both bilaterally and with our other neighbours — particularly in the peaceful solution of the dispute in the area and in joint scientific and economic endeavours there.

"We renewed our commitment to the realisation of the Asean Free Trade Area (Afta) and to the early launching of the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC), a concept that arose from Dr Mahathir's statesmanly vision, a proposal which we fully support."