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Abdullah-Mindanao

M'SIA PLEDGES TECHNICAL AID TO MINDANAO

By: Muin Abdul Majid

MANILA, Nov 21 (Bernama) -- Malaysia said today it is prepared to help Mindanao in producing a trained workforce to enable them to participate in the development of the island in southern Philippines.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said he gave the assurance to Mindanao Governor Nur Misuari in a meeting with him here.

Nur Misuari had expressed his wish to cooperate with Malaysia and seek technical cooperation to help him develop the resource-rich but generally under-developed Mindanao, he told reporters after the meeting.

"Nur Misuari really wants to do something constructive to enable the Mindanao people to earn a better income and a higher living standard," said Abdullah, who is here to attend the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) forum ministerial-level meeting which begins tomorrow.

Malaysian businessmen had ventured into the agricultural, infrastructure, telecommunication, mineral exploration and development of small-and medium-scale industries sector in the reconstruction of the island.

Abdullah said the island, which is part of the East Asean Growth Area (EAGA), should also benefit from the development of the region.

On security situation in Mindanao, he said Malaysian businessmen should not worry about it as the situation was better now than before.

"Even in developed countries, there is no place which is 100 per cent save, as such, with the assurance we have, they can go to Mindanao," he said.

Meanwhile, Nur Misuari said Mindanao would be receptive to any business proposals from Malaysian businessmen.

He said the fertile soil in the island was good for plantation activities besides its abundant mineral deposits like iron, nickel and gold.

Nur Misuari also thanked the Malaysian government for the encouragement given to him in his pursuit for peace in Mindanao.

Abdullah also met his Japanese counterpart Yukihiko Ikeda who conveyed Japan's support for taking in new members into Apec particularly Vietnam's entry in the 18-member grouping.

He said Ikeda express the hope that Malaysia would give due consideration to Japan's views at the Apec forum.

"However, I told him that Apec should remain as a economic cooperation forum and other agenda's like security should not be brought in as we have the Asean Regional Forum to discuss such issues," he said.

Ikeda also said that Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto would visit Malaysia in the near future and also hoped that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would make an official visit to Japan, he added.

-- BERNAMA

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