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Yong-Peace

IMPACT OF PEACE DEAL IN PHILIPPINES

TAWAU, July 20 (Bernama) -- The impending peace between Manila and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the Philippines will bear challenges for Sabah, Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee said today.

He said the situation would give an opportunity for Sabah's relatively conservative investors to venture into the southern Philippines.

"A more daunting one is in adapting to doing business and living without the cheap labour provided by the illegal immigrants in the state," he said in his talk at a Youth Convention on "Towards the 21st Century", organised by the Young Malaysian Movement (YMM) here.

He said Sabah had stood and watched the trouble in southern Philippines, and tolerated with the many problems resulting from the influx of Filipinos from the strife-torn region.

News of progress towards peace settlement in the area has been greeted with relief by Sabah, as it offers opportunities to reduce the push-pull factor that induces Filipinos from the south to come to Sabah as economic migrants.

The MNLF recently decided to give up its 24-year armed struggle for secession to join the nation's political mainstream. Its fiery leader, Nur Misuari, will be a government candidate in regional elections in September.

Yong said the time had come for Sabahans to show that they, too, possessed the "Malaysia Can Do" spirit.

"And please, don't regard this only as a battle slogan. It is a spirit we must cultivate into our psyche because it will be a key element to determine whether we succeed or succumb in the 21st Century," he said.

He said Sabahans had their place and space on Malaysian soil as the Filipinos in the southern Philippines were going to secure theirs through a peace agreement.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had led the Malay majority in the country to accommodate the aspirations of non-Malays whereas President Fidel Ramos was now asking the Christian majority to accept his concept of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development, he said.

"The moral of these examples is the ability and willingness to look at the broader picture of national interest," he added. -- BERNAMA

OPP YBY