

16 DEC 1996

LEAD Mahathir-Misuari

MALAYSIA OFFERS HELP TO DEVELOP MINDANAO

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 16 (Bernama) -- Malaysia today gave an undertaking that it will participate actively in the economic development of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), including developing its human resources, infrastructure and tourism.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he has promised ARMM Governor Nur Misuari during their talks at the Prime Minister's Department here today that Malaysia would see to it that its businessmen participate in Mindanao.

Speaking to reporters after launching the "Kempen Galakan Tabungan" here, Dr Mahathir said training programme for the people of Mindanao was among the subjects they discussed at their one-hour meeting.

Misuari, who is also Chairman of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development, arrived last night for a week-long official visit. He had met Dr Mahathir briefly in Subic Bay in the Philippines during the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) meeting.

The objective of Misuari's visit is to invite Malaysian companies to invest in economic and joint-venture projects in the southern Philippines, which is one of the five territories within the East Asean Growth Area.

Misuari had a long list of appointments today, starting with Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi followed by Dr Mahathir, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamad.

In his talks with Anwar, Misuari had, according to Foreign Ministry undersecretary for Southeast Asia and Asia Pacific Division Mohd Arshad Hussain, requested for Malaysia's help in establishing an Islamic Development Bank.

Earlier Abdullah told reporters after Misuari called on him at Wisma Putra that Malaysia could provide planners in economic sectors and experts to train the Mindanao people.

Abdullah said he also suggested that the ARMM implement Felde-style land schemes to create more jobs and enable the impoverished region improve the living standard of its people.

Malaysia is extending cooperation to the ARMM within the framework of bilateral ties with the Philippines, he said.

Abdullah said Malaysian businessmen have started to venture into Mindanao to undertake mineral exploration and the development of agriculture and infrastructure.

Meanwhile, Mara has agreed to provide skill training for Mindanao entrepreneurs as soon as it gets the go-ahead from the government.

Mustapa told reporters after his meeting with Misuari that Mara has facilities for skill training.

He said training programmes would be coordinated by the Prime Minister's Department and the Foreign Ministry.

Mustapa said the ministry also encourages Malaysian companies to invest in joint-venture business and development projects in Mindanao.

Misuari told reporters that Mindanao would benefit from learning about Mara's function in giving out loans and scholarships to students studying locally and overseas.

"The indigenous people in Mindanao had been at the receiving end for many decades and had been neglected and abandoned.

"We have to learn from the experiences of Mara how to provide

opportunities for them to make up for this neglect and I think there will be close cooperation in the future," he said. -- BERNAMA

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