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Mahathir-Pact

MALAYSIA WELCOMES MANILA-MORO PEACE PACT

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 3 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia welcomes the peace pact between the Philippines government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) which was signed in Manila yesterday.

He said that with the peace accord, which ended 24 years of war in Mindanao province that claimed the lives of more than 125,000 people, Malaysia would invest in the southern Philippines to help uplift the socio-economic status of the Muslims in the territory.

"When the southern Philippines is fully developed, then their own people will not have to migrate to other countries to get jobs but (instead) work in their own country," he said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after opening the People's Progressive Party Malaysia (Baru) (PPP) annual general assembly here.

"The southern Philippines is a very rich region, and it would probably become even richer than certain parts of Malaysia. But because of lack of peace, it has not been able to develop," he said.

"The problem is that the fighting in the south had deprived them of means of livelihood and therefore they migrated. If they have a chance to work in their own country, I'm sure they will," he said.

Tens of thousands of Filipinos fled to Sabah to escape the fighting during the past two decades.

The Prime Minister said the Malaysian private sector would be encouraged to invest in the southern Philippines and he hoped the Malaysians would be accepted as genuine investors who could help in the redevelopment of the country.

Nur Misuari, the leader of the MNLF, signed the accord that took four years to negotiate with chief government negotiator Manuel Yan, witnessed by President Fidel Ramos.

Dr Mahathir said: "Of course, the extremists from both groups will disagree (about the pact)...but the fact remains there must be a compromise and this is a compromise.

"We must accept compromise in settling any dispute, both sides must give in order to gain something. It is better to get 20 per cent of a profitable enterprise than to get 100 per cent of a losing enterprise," he said.

"You fight, you get nothing and since the government is now more willing to recognise the rights of the Filipino Muslims, I think it is also necessary for the Muslims to accept the fact that they are in the Philippines and that they have to follow certain rules, regulations and laws which are applicable in the Philippines," he added. -- BERNAMA

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