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Hamid-Philippine (With pix)

RAMOS THANKS MALAYSIA FOR INVESTING IN PHILIPPINES

By: Zainal Abidin Bujal

MANILA, March 13 (Bernama) -- Philippine President Fidel Ramos is grateful for the investments flowing into his country from Malaysia, Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar said.

He said Ramos was happy that Malaysian investment was helping in the country's development, including in predominantly Muslim Mindanao and other areas in southern Philippines.

The Philippines also wished to send officials to Malaysia to learn from the country's experience in implementing development programmes, said Syed Hamid who had an hour-long meeting with Ramos at Malacanang palace here yesterday.

The Philippines was keen to emulate Malaysia as the republic was embarking on rapid economic development to realise its Vision 2000, he said.

On his meeting with Defence Secretary Renato de Villa, Syed Hamid said they discussed efforts to boost defence ties between the two countries.

The Philippines wanted the cooperation between the armed forces of the two countries to be expanded to all levels and not restricted to the senior officials level, he said.

The Philippines also suggested the holding of military training exchange programmes for officers of both countries, he told Bernama last night at the end of his two-day visit.

He said the question of joint military exercise was also raised but this should be discussed further by the Malaysia-Philippine Joint Commission.

"We must be careful about having joint exercises because we don't want others to get the wrong impression that we are turning into a security block," he said.

He said: "Judging from this brief visit, the Philippines is really keen to learn from Malaysia's experience. The visit has strengthened understanding on the need to build on the close relationship established by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Ramos."

On the mounting tension between China and Taiwan, Syed Hamid said Malaysia hoped that the situation would not worsen to the extent of affecting regional peace and stability.

"I don't think China will take aggressive action because they are looking more at the overall international interest," he said.

"The stand adopted by China now is a question of sovereignty and integrity which they regard as important. I think they want to show the world that China will not compromise on matters they hold strongly to," he said.

This is Syed Hamid's first visit to the Philippines after succeeding Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak as the Defence Minister.

He was accompanied by Ministry Secretary-General Datuk Azizan Hashim and Navy Chief Laksamana Madya Datuk Ahmad Ramli Haji Mohamad Nor. -- Bernama

ZAB AHH YBY