

24 MAR 1997

MALAYSIAN FIRM TO BUILD HOUSES, INFRASTRUCTURE IN MINDANAO

By: Ali Mamat

ZAMBOANGA CITY, March 24 (Bernama) -- A Malaysian company is now preparing to undertake construction of several infrastructure projects, particularly housing, in the four provinces under the jurisdiction of the Autonomous Region of Muslim in Mindanao (ARMM) and the 14 provinces under the supervision of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD).

Initially, the focus of the company, Nadi Perdana Sdn Bhd (NPSB), would be the construction of low-cost houses, which are in great demand in the ARMM and the SPCPD regions.

The memorandum of understanding for the venture between NPSB and its Filipino counterpart, Minsupala Fastrack Development Corporation (MFDC), was held here on March 17 in the presence of ARMM Governor, Prof Nur Misuari, who is also the chairman of SPCPD.

NPSB was represented by its Managing Director Nik Husin Nik Yusoff and MFDC by its Executive Chairman Dr Abdurahman U. Amin. The ceremony was held at the end of the second sitting of the SPCPD Consultative Assembly.

Nik Husin later said the joint-venture company would initially undertake the construction of 5,000 units of low-cost houses in Palawan Province, soon after completing its feasibility study.

Under the long-term plan, construction of similar houses in other parts of the region was also proposed for consideration, mainly for the resettlement of several thousands of the former fighters of the Misuari-led Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), particularly in its stronghold provinces of Sulu and Cotabato.

The MNLF signed a peace agreement with the Philippine government on Sept 2 last year, leading to the birth of ARMM and SPCPD. At the peak of its struggle for Moro self-rule in Mindanao which began in 1968, the MNLF had, reportedly, a strength of at least 15,000 armed regulars.

Nik Husin said that other long term ventures which were placed before the NPSB for consideration were hotel and tourism sectors. Besides that, several Philippines entrepreneurs had also approached NPSB to jointly venture into seaweed and coconut processing industries.

The Sulu and Tawi-Tawi provinces contribute about 80 percent of the Philippine raw seaweed production. It was reported that the annual returns of the industry amounted to about RM5 billion, with Japan, America and Europe as its biggest traditional markets, and China, the newly discovered potential.

A wholly-owned Bumiputra company, NPSB is the holding company of the well diversified Nadi Perdana Group of Companies, whose core businesses are information technology, business consultancy, facilities management, property development and construction.

Under the MOU, MFDC would identify and secure suitable land for joint development with NPSB, facilitate the gathering of data as inputs for the preliminary feasibility studies to be prepared by NPSB, facilitate the application for appropriate incentives granted by the Philippine government and assist in the marketing of the developed projects.

NPSB, on the other hand, would provide technical and financial resource packages and the necessary leadership in the project management of all their joint-venture projects.

In welcoming the readiness of NPSB to accept the offer, Misuari said the ARMM and SPCPD had no other alternative but to depend on foreign

expertise and capital, especially from among the Islamic countries, to expedite the development process of the region after almost 30 years of neglect due to the war between the MNLF and the Philippine army.

The peace deal between MNLF and Manila was brokered by the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), with Malaysia and Indonesia playing an active role.

Misuari said he had full confidence on Malaysian investors, due to their prowess and capability, coupled with the commitment and high sense of brotherhood displayed by her leaders, particularly Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, towards less fortunate Muslims in other parts of the world and in poor countries in dire need of assistance.

Earlier, several Malaysian private investors and government corporations had indicated their interest or entered into agreements to invest in various sectors in the ARMM and SPCPD regions, either directly or within the framework of cooperation of the East Asean Growth Area which incorporated Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia and the Philippines (BIMP-EAGA).

They include Ekran Bhd (for hotel projects), several state economic development corporations (fisheries, coconut and seaweed processing and water transport), Petronas (petroleum), Lembaga Tabung Haji (oil palm plantations), Westmont Group and Wing Tiek Holdings (steel mills, shipping and electricity), SAFMA Sdn Bhd (tuna canning) and Harrison Holdings (M) Bhd (pineapple processing). -- BERNAMA

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