

Cordial solution sought on Sabah

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Philippines has agreed with Malaysia that the two countries need to move towards a cordial resolution of the Philippines' claim to Sabah.

Philippine president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo said the Sabah issue was raised during her one-on-one meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Tuesday.

"The Prime Minister and I discussed it and agreed that we should move forward towards a cordial resolution of this issue.

"We have to do this slowly with extensive consultation with our constituents," she told a press conference after delivering her keynote address at the Malaysia-Philippines Business Forum here yesterday.

She said she had instructed her foreign affairs secretary to form panels and start

working on resolving the issue immediately.

Arroyo said the issue had been put on hold by previous administrations.

Asked whether the Philippines was willing to drop its claim to Sabah, Arroyo said she needed to consult her "constituents."

"It will take a long time and extensive study and consultation to resolve the issue.

"I am not prepared to give any statement on that now. We need to consult Filipinos in the south or the north for that matter," she added.

Commenting on the Philippines' intervention in the ownership dispute between Malaysia and Indonesia over the Sipidan and Ligitan islands, off the coast of Sabah, Arroyo said:

"As long as the claim on Sabah is there, then we have to intervene in any proceedings that are related to the islands."