

Manila backs Dr M

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Claims on extremist groups justified

MANILA, Mon. The Philippine Government today backed up Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Or Mahathir Mohamad's claim that extremist groups were linking up with local separatists.

Manila has received "intelligence reports several months back that fundamentalist groups based in Malaysia (have) been trying to link up with our own Islamic groups," President Gloria Arroyo's spokesman, Rigoberto Tiglao told reporters.

Tiglao said Philippine authorities have been instructed to "really check on visitors from other coun-

tries to make sure that they are not identified with Islamic groups."

A Malaysian newspaper yesterday quoted Mahathir as saying that a group calling itself the "Malaysian Militant Group" has forged links with Philippine and Indonesian rebels waging war with their Governments.

"Their objective is so ambitious to set up Islamic Governments in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines through force — but it will not be that easy," Mahathir was quoted as saying.

Tiglao said the presidential palace has received reports that the

Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the country's main Muslim rebel force, enjoyed close links with Malaysian fundamentalists.

But the spokesman said the report should not affect ongoing peace talks with the 12,500-strong MILF, which has been waging a 23-year Islamic rebellion in southern Mindanao island.

Suspected MILF rebels on Sunday ambushed a provincial governor in Mindanao, wounding six of his bodyguards, in what the military said was a violation of a ceasefire accord. AFP