

29 MAR 2001

Mahathir-talks

ARROYO THANKS MAHATHIR FOR HOSTING TALKS

MANILA, March 29 (Bernama) -- President Gloria Arroyo today thanked Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for hosting last week's talks that paved the way for the resumption of peace dialogue between Manila and the Moro separatist rebels.

"His assistance comes as a sterling act of statesmanship in behalf of a nation and a people we consider our brethren," she said in an official statement.

Special emissaries of Arroyo and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) secretly met last week in Kuala Lumpur under the auspices of Dr Mahathir and the Prime Minister's Department.

Both sides agreed to resume the peace talks which fizzled out last year after then president Joseph Estrada ordered an all-out war against the secessionists in Mindanao.

The MILF at the same time dropped its demand for pre-conditions prior to the talks such as the return of its camps captured by government troops last year.

Tun Daim Zainuddin, Malaysia's Finance and Special Functions Minister, witnessed the two sides sealed the deal in Kuala Lumpur.

Arroyo expressed her appreciation to Dr Mahathir for helping the Philippines in its efforts to achieve enduring peace in Mindanao.

She described as a "major breakthrough" the talks in Kuala Lumpur that will jump start the Mindanao peace process.

"Let me say this: never again shall our Muslim brethren find reason to rebel or to seek independence or secession," she said.

"Let us weld our hearts and minds together in search of genuine unity and solidarity based on mutual respect, trust, sincere understanding and a common vision for the upliftment and empowerment of our people," she added.

-- BERNAMA

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