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Najib-Mindanao

M'SIA EVER WILLING TO HELP IN QUEST FOR PEACE IN MINDANAO, SAYS NAJIB

CYBERJAYA, Aug 3 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will continue to render whatever assistance it can towards achieving peace in Mindanao and hopes that this will not be misconstrued as interfering in the internal affairs of another country, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today.

"Malaysia will continue to play its part if called upon by all parties. We have brokered this peace agreement and we hope to see that this agreement is implemented and the end objective is fully realised," he said.

He said this at a media conference after witnessing the initialling of a document between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) that paves the way for unity between the two bodies that separately claim to represent the five million Muslims in Mindanao known as the Moro people.

The MNLF struck two peace deals with Manila in 1976 and 1996 which led to the formation of the autonomous region of MNLF, is currently having peace negotiations with the Philippine government, also in Malaysia.

On the unity deal, Najib said: "They have decided not to pursue violence, not to wage war. Obviously, it is incumbent upon both sides to see the agreement through in letter and in spirit. I think we will see the beginning of a new era for the people of Mindanao."

Earlier, in his speech, Najib said the MILF should not let pride or principles make them lose the opportunity for peace and development offered by the new Philippine administration under President Gloria Arroyo.

He said the MILF/MNLF unity agreement, which would be formally signed on Tuesday during Arroyo's visit to Malaysia, would also contribute towards peace and stability in the region.

"This unity will provide you with a mechanism for a collective approach in cooperating with the Philippine government to resolve the question of political empowerment, social upliftment and economic development," he said.

Both the MILF and MNLF representatives present today said they were committed to the unity deal and expressed gratitude to the Malaysian government for its role in facilitating peace deals involving the Moro people.

MILF vice-chairman Murad Ebrahim was hopeful that Manila would welcome this new development as it meant that it would be easier for the Philippine government to deal with the Moro people as one entity.

The MNLF was represented by a member of its executive council, Hatimil Hassan.

Meanwhile, in KOTA TINGGI, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the two agreements -- one between the MILF and the MNLF and the other between the MNLF and the Philippine government -- to be signed during President Arroyo's visit were historic because they showed the serious efforts by both bodies to bring peace to the southern Philippines.

He said that with peace the Philippines would be able to attract more investors to its southern region.

President Arroyo's delegation will comprise four ministers, including its Defence Secretary, and 150 members of its private sector who will discuss investments and joint ventures with Malaysian businessmen.

"President Arroyo will also hold discussions with Dr Mahathir," he said, adding that the choice of Malaysia as President Arroyo's first stop in her tour of the Asean countries was proof of the good relations between

the Philippines and Malaysia.

President Arroyo will be in Malaysia from Aug 7 to 9.

-- BERNAMA

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