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Agong-Arroyo

PEACE IN SOUTHERN P'PINES WILL BRING INVESTMENTS, SAYS KING

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 7 (Bernama) -- The establishment of peace and harmony in southern Philippines will facilitate the return of private sector together with the necessary investments needed to develop the region, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah said tonight.

The King said that with the presence of peace, the development in the region concerned could be implemented more effectively and efficiently.

"In this regard, Malaysia will continue to cooperate with the Philippines in establishing peace in Mindanao as well as ensuring the success of the co-operative programmes under the Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines - East Asean Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA)," he said.

Sultan Salahuddin said this at a state banquet in honour of visiting Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo at the Istana Negara. The president began a three-day official visit to Malaysia today.

Also present were the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Siti Aishah, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Datin Seri Dr Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and members of the Malaysian cabinet.

The president's husband, Jose Miguel Arroyo, also attended the banquet.

Sultan Salahuddin said consistent with improved bilateral relations, the trade value between Malaysia and Philippines had also increased from about US\$1.5 billion in 1996 to US\$3 billion in 2000. (US\$1=RM3.8)

Malaysia and the Philippines, the King said, had established a joint commission as a mechanism to carry out the various programmes to intensify their bilateral relations and co-operation.

"We hope that both countries will continue to strive for closer relations among their leaders and people through exchange of visits at all levels," he said.

On globalisation, Sultan Salahuddin said the process could bring various benefits but at the same time, it had shown many negative effects that could affect or destabilise the independence and sovereignty of some countries.

"Realising this fact, we sincerely hope that Malaysia and the Philippines would continue to co-operate with other Asean members in facing these challenges," he said.

In her reply, Arroyo praised Malaysia especially Dr Mahathir for the support shown in the peace process in southern Philippines.

She said the talks between Manila and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front hosted by Kuala Lumpur had had a significant impact in the pursuit for peace in the region.

"We acknowledge Malaysia's contribution to the Mindanao peace process in line with Dr Mahathir's own caveat of 'no fighting, no secession' which upholds the inviolable sovereignty and constitutional processes of our nation," she said.

She was hopeful that Malaysia would once again play its pivotal role in the development process in southern Philippines.

Arroyo also highlighted the promising investment prospects especially in palm oil plantation whereby the Philippines intended to open 160,000 ha of land for that purpose.

Another area that could be of interest, she said, was the gas pipeline project between the Philippine National Oil Company and Malaysia's Petronas.

In addition, the president thanked Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir for signing, on behalf of the Malaysian government, a tourism agreement which would enable both countries to promote each other's destinations in international tourist markets through joint tourism programmes.

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