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Ramos pays tribute to Malaysia

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FORMER Philippine President Fidel V Ramos paid tribute to the Malaysian authorities for assisting the Manila government with the quick capture of Nur Misuari.

In an interview with the New Straits Times, he said Manila appreciates the efforts of the Malaysian government and of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Earlier, in his speech at the 14th annual general meeting of the Pacific Economic Co-operation Council (PECC), he said: "Note how quickly Malaysia moved to detain Nur Misuari, the ousted leader of the Moro National Liberation front (MNLF)."

He told the audience that Misuari had fled to Sabah after fomenting in cahoots with the Abu Sayyaf an abortive rebellion in Mindanao-Sulu earlier this month.

In the interview, he described Misuari as the "Osama bin Laden of the Southern Philippines", adding that the actions of Misuari were "regrettable, tragic and deplorable."

"He had the opportunity to bring development to the southern Mindanao region. We gave him a pie and he threw it in our face," Ramos said.

Even as this problem with the MNLF exists, Ramos told the PECC participants that he does not think that terrorism will gain ground in South-East Asia.

He added that the usual suspect - the Abu Sayyaf group in the Southern Philippines - has degenerated into a "kidnap for ransom gang" and exposed itself together with Misuari's splinter faction to national, regional and global sanctions against terrorist groups by virtue of UN Security Council Resolution 1368.

He stressed that governments were moving to clamp down separatist rebellions and for instance, the special autonomy Jakarta was offering Aceh province would help redistribute in Aceh's favour revenues from oil and natural gas resources.

Ramos said that even Southeast Asian Muslims, who belonged to the quieter Sufi sect - had been caught up in political Islamism, but "they have shunned Islamist calls for Jihad".

"The middle classes built up in both Malaysia and Indonesia through economic development over this last generation are a powerful moderating influence."

He said most South-East Asian Muslims do not regard their direct political interests as engaged in the Afghanistan conflict and added: "In our region, even so called 'religious' quarrels are often really about land rights or the political control of territory - and consequently access to its resources".

This, Ramos said, is true of Aceh rebellion and the communal problem in the Moluccas as it is of the separatism in the South Western Philippines.

The former President said even now Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines are negotiating a pact that would commit them to sharing intelligence on terrorist activities, keeping tighter control of their frontiers to stop the flow of weapons, and undertaking joint law enforcement and peace keeping operations.

Touching on the "devastating attacks" of Sept 11, Ramos said "mega terrorism is proving to be the darker side of globalisation".

While Osama bin Laden's brand of terrorism threatens the rich countries

most directly, he said it has inflicted the worst collateral damage on the export-oriented developing countries.

He said on the positive side, Sept 11 has generated a keener sense of "our shared interests and common vulnerabilities."

It has also made the affluent countries realise how poverty - together with perceived injustice - can breed global instabilities, he added.

Sept 11 and its after effects helped to push the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting in Doha to agree on a new round of talks in order to bring down the remaining barriers to freer global trade.

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