

06 AUG 2003

Peace

MANILA APPRECIATES KL'S ROLE IN PEACE TALKS

MANILA, Aug 6 (Bernama) -- Manila today extended its appreciation to Kuala Lumpur for its willingness to play the principal role as host in the peace talks between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Philippine government.

President Gloria Arroyo specifically thanked Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for his initiative and willingness to host the peace talks in Kuala Lumpur.

The talks were scheduled in May but put on hold following an attack on the Siocon town on Mindanao island a few days before the peace talks. The attack resulted in several deaths and Manila has blamed the MILF.

The MILF, with a strong force of some 12,500 has been fighting for an independent Islamic state in the southern tip of the Philippines since 1978.

Arroyo extended the appreciation in her keynote address when opening the Seventh Asean Finance Ministers meeting here.

Last month, Arroyo met Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who was on a four-hour stopover in Manila en route to Tokyo, to iron out some kinks stalling the peace talks with the separatist Muslim rebels in southern Philippines.

Both leaders discussed the need to resume talks between Manila and the Philippine government in Kuala Lumpur.

-- BERNAMA

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