

Duterte's visit to M'sia will open new chapter, says DPM

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Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte's visit to Malaysia this week would open a new chapter in Malaysia's endeavour to help resolve issues surrounding Mindanao, the influx of Filipinos into Sabah and security.

Malaysia's role as third party in finding a solution to issues besieging the southern Philippines particularly Mindanao was important, he said, because although Malaysia's effort through its facilitator, (the late) Tengku Datu Abdul Ghafar Tengku Mohamed was acknowledged by the past Philippines leadership, it could not be executed conclusively.

"So President Duterte's visit to Malaysia for a meeting with Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak this Thursday will be an undertaking to determine whether Bangsamoro Transition Commission atau BTC could be implemented," he told Malaysian journalists in London.

Ahmad Zahid, who is on a five-day visit to the United Kingdom beginning Monday, said Malaysia represented by Najib and himself as defence minister at the time, had witnessed the signing of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).

"In regards to the visit this time, the prospect for Malaysia to continue playing the role appears to be very bright and we believe the Filipinos under their new leadership would be more open to the involvement of other quarters," he said.

The deputy prime minister hoped the agreements that had been signed between the Philippine government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) chairperson Murad Ebrahim would this time around involve parties of interest including minority groups in the southern Philippines.

"It will indirectly resolve the issue of undocumented Filipinos in Sabah as proposed in the Royal Commission of Inquiry (on illegal immigrants in Sabah)," he said.

Ahmad Zahid said from the aspect of implementing the RCI's recommendations, a main committee chaired jointly by the chief minister of Sabah and himself and the working committee chaired by Joseph Pairin Kitingan, would hopefully be able to complete the tasks proposed by the RCI.

"I am confident that this visit will resolve many perennial issues, aside from the security issues in Esszone (Eastern Sabah Security Zone) which has a coastline of about 1,700km under the Esscom (Eastern Sabah Security Command), particularly kidnap-for-ransom.

"During this visit, a number of diplomatic questions particularly involving Sabah would inevitably be discussed; I see that President Duterte has a very proactive view in finding

solutions to the long-standing dilemma between Malaysia and the Philippines,” he said.

Zahid said Malaysia was of the view that prosperity in the southern Philippines could resolve the political and socio-economic issues in the area and in Sabah.

- *Bernama*

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