

Philippines-MILF Agreement Expected By Year-end
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KUALA LUMPUR, July 3 (Bernama) -- The Philippine Government is optimistic of reaching an agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) by year-end to bring peace in the southern Philippines.

Philippine Ambassador to Malaysia, J. Eduardo Malaya said negotiations and talks between both sides are still ongoing and facilitated by the Malaysian government.

"Ongoing efforts to bring peace to the Southern Philippines are in significant progress...in fact, talks and negotiations between the Philippines and MILF take place almost every month in Kuala Lumpur.

"An agreement is expected to be signed, hopefully within the year, and both sides are working towards our goal," he told Bernama, following an hour-long presentation by an acapella choir group, 'The Philippine Madrigal Singers', at the embassy here Tuesday.

The group, which will be performing at the Trinity Methodist Church this Thursday and Friday, had earlier performed at the George Town Festival in Penang on July 2.

Also present was Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen.

Malaya said, two months ago, there was a consensus document whereby, both sides agreed on a general principle to guide them in the negotiations to move forward.

He stressed on the importance of "deep negotiations and sincerity of both sides".

He said the signing ceremony pertaining to the agreement involving the Philippines and MILF might be carried out in Manila after the final decision was made.

The Philippines and the MILF have been discussing off-and-on for 13 years to end the four decade-long conflict in the southern Philippines.

The peace talks brokered by Malaysia since 2001, aims to end the 40-year Muslim insurgency which left 120,000 people killed.

Malaysia is also head of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) in Mindanao.

Meanwhile, Dr Ng said new air routes which served Malaysia and the Philippines were expected to increase tourist arrivals to both countries.

"Philippine Tourism Secretary Ramon Jimenez Jr and I agreed that regional neighbours should work together for mutual benefit...we are not competitors, we are a synergy.

"We will work out ways to bring tourists from the Philippines to Malaysia and promote the Philippines among Malaysian travellers, and at the same time, also boost bilateral tourism," she added.

Malaya said, AirAsia Philippines and Airphil Express had started to serve Malaysian routes since Dr Ng's visit to the country in March, this year.

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