

**Malaysia Has To Help Sustain Bangsamoro Peace Deal, Says Najib  
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From R. Ravichandran**

MANILA, Oct 16 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has to continue playing the role of facilitator to ensure sustainability of the peace deal reached between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said here.

He said the previous agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) failed due to the absence of a team to monitor the implementation of the pact.

"So, this time, it is most important to have a third party trusted by both sides to monitor the agreement. It looks like the two sides have confidence in Malaysia and our role," he told Malaysian journalists last night.

Najib said details would have to be worked out through direct discussions with the two sides to try and determine an appropriate structure and method for Malaysia to continue with its role.

The Malaysian prime minister yesterday witnessed here the signing of a Malaysia-brokered historic pact - the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro - by the Philippine government and the MILF to end 40 years of conflict in the southern Philippines.

"Malaysia's role does not end with this framework agreement because there are several other aspects which have to be considered, one of which is the demobilisation of the MILF military force to enable the soldiers return to civilian life,"

Najib said after he and his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, had met the Malaysian community in the Philippines at a hotel, here.

Asked what role Malaysia would play in the demobilisation process, Najib said that had to be discussed.

"We have to discuss that with the MILF. With the agreement, they (MILF military) will demobilise in stages and the process has to be monitored and verified by a third party. Malaysia is the most appropriate party to play that role," he said.

Najib said that in his talks with President Aquino yesterday, the Philippine leader expressed the hope that Malaysia could play a major role in providing training opportunities for young people in the southern Philippines who lagged in terms of development due to the almost four decades of conflict there.

"Besides, I also indicated the possibility of Malaysia participating in land development there," he added.

Najib said that whatever had to be done would be agreed upon at the Joint Commission Meeting (JCM).

He said Aquino had also sought cooperation between the armed forces of the two countries and suggested an expansion through a so-called 'Visiting Forces Agreement'.

The prime minister said such cooperation would require consideration of several legal aspects.

Najib said Malaysia hoped for an improvement in economic cooperation because, despite growing bilateral trade, investment was still not high.

"We are hopeful that with the prevailing goodwill through our role in arriving at the peace agreement, Malaysia will get a more positive reception in the context of bilateral relations," he said.

Najib said it was important not only to create investment opportunities in the southern Philippines, but also to determine that the risk was low.

Peace would bring economic development and, in this matter, the Philippine government would have to increase expenditure for the region, including to develop infrastructure, he said.

Najib said Aquino had indicated that he would increase financial allocations for the southern Philippines, and added that the Philippine government would have to establish opportunities to draw investment and introduce programmes to raise the level of education and skills of the people there.

He said the MILF leaders also realised the challenges they had to face in bringing benefits to their supporters and followers as a result of the agreement.

"In my discussions with (MILF chairman) Murad Ibrahim, he spoke of the biggest challenge of how to bring the benefits of the peace agreement to his supporters in the shortest time possible. Otherwise, they would raise questions ... possibly because they are hungry for change," he said.

Asked about the MNLF's rejection of the agreement, Najib said the MNLF should face the present reality and participate in the Bangsamoro development process.

"I think eventually, without external support, the MNLF will have to come to terms ... (to see) the reality. So, I am hopeful that eventually they will be on board the journey towards developing the 'wilayah' Bangsamoro (Bangsamoro region)," he said.

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