

**KL, Manila Eye Coordinated Sea Patrols In Sulu Sea - Hishammuddin
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 11 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and the Philippines have broached the possibility of a coordinated sea patrol arrangement in the Sulu Sea straddling the two countries.

The matter was discussed at a meeting between Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein and Philippine Secretary of National Defence Voltaire T. Gazmin in Manila today.

The cooperation in this area would mark an enhancement to the maritime domain awareness towards impending non-traditional threats as well as other maritime security-related issues, Hishammuddin said.

He said this in a statement on the outcome of his visit to the Philippines, the final stop of his tour of ASEAN countries.

Hishammuddin said both he and Gazmin also agreed on the proposed establishment of ASEAN Peacekeepers under one flag serving the United Nations.

In addition, he said, Secretary Gazmin expressed the Philippines' support for Malaysia's initiative on the ASEAN Military Ready Group, which ties in with efforts concerning humanitarian aid and disaster relief.

"The group is vital to prepare an ASEAN military team for quick deployment to crisis areas in a coordinated manner," said Hishammuddin who also called on President Benigno Aquino III.

The minister noted that the group could serve under the ASEAN banner as a preventive mechanism in mitigating risks of disasters.

Hishammuddin said he and his Philippine counterpart discussed their intention to promote defence industry cooperation by encouraging industrial cooperation and facilitating the development of technology, commercial and economic links between defence-related companies from the two countries.

"We exchanged views on regional and global security challenges and are committed to strengthening defence cooperation between the Philippines and Malaysia," he said.

Hishammuddin said both ministers reaffirmed the importance of promoting peace, security and stability within the region.

They also expressed serious concern over the violence committed by the militant group IS and other extremist organisations in Iraq and Syria.

On his meeting with President Aquino, Hishammuddin said they agreed on the need to enhance bilateral ties, both at the government and people-to-people levels.

Aquino, he said, noted Malaysia's constructive role as the third party facilitator, leading the International Monitoring Team (IMT) in Mindanao since 2001.

"The president expressed his desire for a positive outcome emanating from the ongoing peace process (in southern Philippines)," he added.

The Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front signed a Malaysia-brokered peace accord expected to end the decades-long armed conflict in Mindanao, in March 2014.

Hishammuddin also visited the IMF headquarters in Cotabato City, during which he reaffirmed Malaysia's continuous support for the peace process between the Philippine government and MILF.

"The arrival of the new IMT team, the 10th in its series with a new mandate from March 2015 to March 2016 is proof that Malaysia remains committed to finding lasting solutions in Mindanao," he said.

The IMT is currently composed of 16 members from Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam (nine), Indonesia (nine), Japan (two) and Norway (two).

The team is responsible for issues related to security, socio-economy, civilian protection and humanitarian rehabilitation development.

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