

## 《Envoy seeks to break ice with Beijing》

A special Philippine envoy who is in Hong Kong to test the waters of bilateral ties suggested on Tuesday that Manila and Beijing cooperate on sectors of common interest to rekindle their relationship, which was soured by maritime disputes.

Experts said that although the proposal by the envoy, former Philippines president Fidel Ramos, to improve economic and tourism links might be considered by China, the Philippines' attitude toward the arbitration ruling on the South China Sea remains the key to restoring ties.

Ramos, 88, also told reporters on Tuesday that he planned to meet with Wu Shicun, who heads the National Institute for South China Sea Studies, a think tank on China's southernmost Hainan Island.

Ramos, who gave no other details of his itinerary for the five-day trip to Hong Kong, said earlier that he would meet "old friends" with links to officials in Beijing.

Wu did not respond to phone calls from China Daily seeking comment on Tuesday.

As a special envoy of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, Ramos defined the trip as "ice-breaking", after bilateral ties were jeopardized by an arbitration case unilaterally initiated by Duterte's predecessor, Benigno Aquino III.

"The idea is to use the South China Sea as a place to save lives, not to kill people or to destroy lives," Ramos said.

During his time as president, from 1992 to 1998, the two countries eased tensions caused by confrontations over Meiji Reef.

Xu Liping, a senior Southeast Asian studies researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said Beijing could consider Ramos' suggestion and seek common interests with Manila.

Chen Qinghong, a researcher of Southeast Asian and Philippine studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, said that Ramos' remarks send a positive signal and provide an opportunity for the two countries to rebuild political trust and amend their relationship.

Zhang Yaozhong contributed to this story.