

07 APR 1996

Bildt-conference

BRUSSELS CONFERENCE IS ON AS SCHEDULED, SAYS BILDT

KUALA LUMPUR, April 7 (Bernama) -- International High Representative to Bosnia-Herzegovina Carl Bildt today confirmed that the Brussels Conference will be held as scheduled even without the representatives of the Bosnian Serbs.

"The second donors' conference in Brussels will go ahead eventhough there is not much progress from the Bosnian Serbs," he told Bernama at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport here before his departure for Tokyo.

He said the two-day conference beginning on Friday is expected to be attended by 50 to 60 countries.

The conference is aimed at raising millions of dollars for the reconstruction of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Brussels Conference will try to raise US\$1.2 billion in pledges for Bosnia this year to add to the US\$600 million in pledges made last year.

Bildt, who arrived here yesterday for a two-day stopover to seek Malaysia's support on the restructuring of the war-ravaged Balkan state, said Malaysia played an important role among member countries of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) towards helping the reconstruction of the former Yugoslavian state.

A report recently said the conference will be called off unless the 88 Bosnian war prisoners held by the three warring factions -- Muslims, Croats and Serbs -- are released.

However, reports from Sarajevo said the Bosnian Muslim authorities late Friday freed 18 Serbs prisoners of war, handing them over to Nato-led peace Implementation Force (IFOR) troops. The Bosnian Croats meanwhile took 28 Serbs from a jail near Mostar to a site near the Bosnian town of Kupres where they were supposed to be handed to the Serb authorities.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, 28 prisoners of war were held by the Bosnian federation, 44 by the Croats and 16 by the Serbs.

Bidlt said he was confident that the Brussels meeting would result in positive notes even without representatives of the Bosnian Serbs.

On his short stay in Malaysia, the former Swedish Prime Minister who is no stranger to Malaysia said during his meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, both of them indicated Malaysia's willingness to help in the reconstruction of Bosnia. Bidlt made an official visit to Malaysia in 1994 when heading the Swedish government.

On his one-day stopover in the Japanese capital, Bidlt said: "It is a similar mission as the one in Malaysia and I hope I will be able to meet the Japanese Prime Minister, Finance Minister and Foreign Minister."

He said Japan is another country that has indicated its willingness to assist in the reconstruction of the Balkan state.

Bidlt, accompanied by special adviser Dame Pauline Neville-Jones, spokesman Micheal Maclay and personal secretary Bjorn Lyvvall, will proceed to Sarajevo after Tokyo before going to Brussels.

Malaysia is expected to be represented at the Brussels Conference by Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar, who is also attending a conference of the OIC Assistance Mobilisation Group for Bosnia-Herzegovina in Sarajevo. -- Bernama

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