

06 APR 1996
Bildt-Bosnia
BRUSSELS CONFERENCE LIKELY TO BE ON SCHEDULE

KUALA LUMPUR, April 6 (Bernama) -- International High Representative to Bosnia-Herzegovina Carl Bildt said today the Brussels Conference is likely to be held as scheduled next weekend although it might not include representatives of the Bosnian Serbs.

"Yes, the indications are that the conference will go ahead," he told a news conference after calling on Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at the Foreign Ministry here.

Bildt, who arrived today for a two-day stopover, said he would assess the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina before making a "final recommendation" to the countries which will be attending the conference.

Organisers of the donors conference, so called because it is aimed at raising millions of dollars for the reconstruction of Bosnia-Herzegovina, have threatened to cancel the meeting unless the 88 Bosnian war prisoners held by the three warring factions -- Muslims, Croats and Serbs -- were released.

However, reports from Sarajevo said the Bosnian Muslim authorities late Friday freed 18 Serb prisoners of war, handing them over to NATO-led peace Implementation Force (IFOR) troops who drove them through the night to the Serb-held town of Pale.

The Bosnian Croats meanwhile took 28 Serbs from a jail near Mostar to a site near the central Bosnian town of Kupres where they were supposed to be handed over to Serb authorities overnight, the reports quoted Red Cross officials as saying.

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

Bildt said: "I am going to make a final recommendation to governments later tonight or early tomorrow.

"As things stand now, it looks as if I would be able to give the green light for the conference but not for the participation of the Bosnian Serbs side."

He hoped that "things would be different in the positive sense" in that the Serbs would release the prisoners before he decides on their participation at the conference.

Asked if he thinks the Serbs would release the prisoners within the next 24 hours, Bildt said: "I don't see it yet...there is a deadline to release the prisoners in Bosnia at 10am today and if they don't, I think they are out of the picture for the time being."

The European Union, co-organisers of the conference, and Russia have said the April 12 and 13 conference would not go ahead unless all prisoners were released.

Malaysia is expected to be represented at the conference by Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar, who will also attend a conference of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Assistance Mobilisation Group for Bosnia-Herzegovina in Sarajevo next week.

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.

Abdullah told the news conference that he informed Bildt about Malaysia's willingness to help in the reconstruction of Bosnia.

"We are really serious and consistent in this matter," he said.

Earlier, Bildt called on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad

at the Prime Minister's Department.

The former Swedish Prime Minister will leave for Tokyo tomorrow. --

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