

05 NOV 1996

NGO-Timor

EAST TIMOR CONFERENCE TO GO ON, SAY ORGANISERS

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 5 (Bernama) -- The organisers of the Asia Pacific Conference on East Timor (Apcet) II have decided to proceed with the conference despite the government's objection to it being held here.

However, they said self-exiled East Timorese leader and Nobel Peace Prize co-winner Jose Ramos-Horta would not be attending the conference.

The spokesman for the conference organisers, Dr Sanusi Osman, said this in a letter faxed to Deputy Home Minister Datuk Megat Junid Megat Ayub today.

Reading the letter to reporters at a news conference here, Dr Sanusi said: "Jose Ramos-Horta, in a gesture of goodwill, has decided not to attend the conference to avoid placing Malaysia in a difficult position with Indonesia.

"However, should the Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) and Deputy Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim) be willing to meet him, he will be available to discuss the issue concerned," he said.

Megat Junid, at a meeting yesterday with the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) sponsoring the conference, urged them to cancel it as it might jeopardise Malaysia's close relationship with Indonesia.

The three-day conference, scheduled to begin on Saturday, is to discuss the issue of East Timor which was annexed by Indonesia in 1976 after it intervened in a civil war in the former Portuguese colony.

Dr Sanusi said the organisers were convinced that the conference was a legitimate step forward to seek a peaceful resolution to the "tragic problems which have besieged our neighbours in East Timor for over 20 years".

"Malaysia has strived for peaceful resolutions of the long-running conflicts in Palestine, South Africa, Cambodia, Bosnia and Mindanao. We should take a similar stand to support a speedy and peaceful resolution to the East Timor situation," he added.

Dr Sanusi, who is the Parti Rakyat Malaysia secretary-general, said the conference is a private initiative and does not represent or reflect government policy, and thus would not jeopardise the special relationship between Malaysia and Indonesia.

Meanwhile, Ramos-Horta in a statement sent to the Apcet committee yesterday expressed his wish to have a personal meeting with Dr Mahathir and Anwar, saying that he would come to Malaysia as soon as it was convenient if a meeting was granted.

"By no means would I want to embarrass the Malaysian government. On the contrary, I believe that the Prime Minister can play a positive role in resolving the conflicts in my country," he said and appealed to the Malaysian government to initiate discussion on East Timor within Asean.

Fielding questions later, Dr Sanusi said a gathering held within a hotel, such as the Apcet conference, does not require a police permit.

He said although Ramos-Horta would not be coming, other East Timorese would attend the conference. -- BERNAMA

MAM CTL