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UN SEC-GEN KOFI ANNAN TO VISIT KL

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, Dec 11 (Bernama) -- United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan will be meeting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and other Asean leaders when he visits Kuala Lumpur from Dec 14-17.

UN spokesman Juan Carlos Brandt said in a telephone interview from the UN headquarters in New York Wednesday that Annan's visit to Kuala Lumpur was important as it affirmed Malaysia's important contributions to the UN.

"Malaysia's contributions to the UN are extremely important and the first thing that comes to mind is the 51st presidency of the UN General Assembly under Tan Sri Razali Ismail, who was an excellent leader in conducting the affairs of the general assembly," Brandt said.

"Everybody agrees the important contribution Malaysia has given to the international community through his leadership," he said.

Malaysia has also participated in peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Somalia under the UN banner and has been active in other UN-related social and economic programmes, he said.

Annan's bilateral talks with Dr Mahathir would cover wide-ranging issues including reform efforts in the UN, the Security Council, Iraq, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Angola.

They are also expected to discuss issues related to drug trafficking, the environment and landmines, Brandt said.

Asked if the secretary-general was willing to talk about Malaysia's call for a review of the UN human rights charter, Brandt said that there was no need to review the charter as long as it was understood by all members that the charter contained universal elements acceptable to all.

In fact, Brandt said, as the UN celebrated its 50th Universal Declaration of Human Rights Wednesday, Annan who is in Tehran, would emphasise in his speech that there was no single model of democracy, human rights or cultural expression in the world, but there should be democracy, human rights and free cultural expression in all the world.

Annan's visit coincides with the Asean Informal Summit from Dec 14-16, which would include a meeting between Asean leaders and leaders from China, Japan and South Korea.

Other issues to be discussed with Asean leaders included unpaid dues by UN members, said Brandt.

Asean presently groups Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

The United States still owes about US\$1.5 billion in unpaid dues to the UN, said Brandt, but has paid enough to remain outside the risk of losing its voting rights at the general assembly.

US Ambassador to the UN Bill Richardson said here Tuesday that the US is the biggest "deadbeat" at the UN for its failure to pay up its dues to the world body.

"It's hard for America to be trusted by the UN. Now the US is faced with trying to convince the UN to drop [its] assessment from 25 per cent of the UN budget to 20 per cent," he said at the National Press Club here.

"We owe over \$1 billion ...we are the biggest deadbeat at the UN. I'll be honest with you, there's no way we are going to win the requested cut in assessment," Richardson said.

While in Kuala Lumpur, Annan is scheduled to have an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Najihah.

He is also scheduled to call on Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Annan's itinerary also include dinner with Asean leaders and briefings by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) as well as the Multimedia Development Corporation (MDC) on the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC).

The MSC is a 750-sq km zone south of Kuala Lumpur devoted to the development of multimedia products and services.-- BERNAMA

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