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Dr Mahathir-Estrada meeting being planned

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Arrangements are being made for a meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Philippine President Joseph Estrada during the Apec summit next month.

Its ambassador to Malaysia Jose Brillantes said they were in the process of preparing the groundwork and talking points.

"And if during it, matters related to the (Estrada's proposed) visit on Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (who is being remanded at the prison in Sungai Buloh) are brought up, then I suppose it can be taken up," he said when asked whether preparations had been made for Estrada to visit Anwar.

Brillantes said this after the opening ceremony of the Women's Institute of Management regional training of trainers' workshop at the Fairlane Hotel by Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Leo Micheal Toyad.

The Philippine President had said he would like to meet Anwar, whom he described as a close friend.

Brillantes said Estrada had welcomed any opportunity to meet the former Deputy Prime Minister but no official notification had been received so far from the Malaysian authorities on the likelihood of such a visit taking place.

"The President has indicated (his willingness), taking the cue from a recent remark by Dr Mahathir that he could meet Anwar. He welcomes that opportunity."

Asked during a Press conference on Oct 17 about Estrada's suggestion that Anwar be placed under house arrest and not treated like common criminals, Dr Mahathir had said: "He is treated very special. I think Estrada can go and see him, whether the treatment is right or not."

Brillantes said the Philippines' Department of Foreign Affairs would be taking up the matter with the Malaysian authorities.

On Malaysia-Philippines ties following Estrada's remarks on Anwar which had apparently angered Malaysia, he said:

"Reactions from both countries have contributed immensely and greatly to easing of tension. For example, Estrada has stated that he would not make any more comments on the matter."

Brillantes also said there should not be any more ambiguities on Estrada's attendance at the Apec meeting as the President had underlined this on several occasions.

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