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Estrada-Mahathir

MANILA ARRANGING FOR ESTRADA-MAHATHIR BILATERAL MEETING

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 24 (Bernama) -- The Philippine government is making arrangements for a bilateral meeting between President Joseph Estrada and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during next month's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders' summit here.

The Philippine ambassador here Jose Brillantes today said Manila was preparing the necessary ground work and talking points for the bilateral meeting.

Asked about Manila requesting for Estrada to visit former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who is awaiting trial for corruption and unnatural sex acts, Brillantes said no such request had been made.

"But if the matter of the visitation comes up during the bilateral meeting, then it will be taken up," he told reporters here after attending the opening of a regional workshop on women's development by Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Dr Leo Michael Toyad.

He said Estrada would definitely be coming for the APEC summit and if permitted to visit Anwar, the president would be happy to do so.

Estrada had said in Manila that he would like to visit Anwar when in Kuala Lumpur for the APEC summit on Nov 17-18.

Asked whether Manila or the embassy would make any request to the Malaysian government to enable Estrade visit Anwar, Brillantes said this would be taken up by the Philippine foreign affairs ministry.

"I am waiting guidance from the ministry," he said.

Asked whether Manila had received any official invitation from the Malaysian government for Estrada to visit Anwar, he said he did not think such invitation had been extended.

"Estrada made a verbal request to visit Anwar following Dr Mahathir's statement that anyone who wants to visit Anwar is possible," he said.

On last week's anti-Estrada demonstration in front of the Philippine Embassy here by people calling themselves "concerned Malaysians", Brillantes said he had informed Manila of the matter.

Some 200 people had gathered peacefully in front of the embassy to protest against Estrada's interference in Malaysia's internal affairs relating to Anwar's recent detention under the Internal Security Act (ISA).

Anwar has since been unconditionally released from ISA detention and is currently under remand pending his trial next month.

"I immediately convey the content of the memorandum to the Philippine authority and it is well known that the reactions of the Philippine and Malaysian governments have contributed immensely and greatly in easing the tension," he said.

As a matter of fact, Estrada had said that he would not make any more comments on matters involving Malaysia, the ambassador added.

-- BERNAMA

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