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Gusmao, Ramos-Horta to visit Malaysia Feb 7-9

EAST Timorese leaders Xanana Gusmao and Jose Ramos-Horta will be visiting Malaysia for three days from February 7-9. Their visit to Kuala Lumpur is part of a series of visits to countries which participated in the United Nations peacekeeping exercise - China, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, in releasing the details of the visit at a press conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, said Wisma Putra is working on the itinerary of both leaders.

Gusmao is currently the president of the National Council for Timorese Resistance while Ramos-Horta is the council's vice-president.

While here, they are expected to call on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"We will also organise briefings for them at the Economic Planning Unit and other agencies... sharing our experience in economic and social development. In addition, we are also arranging for them to visit a Felda scheme," Syed Hamid said.

He said through the visit, the Malaysian Government will also be able to get more information on the situation in East Timor.

Any apprehensiveness over relations between Malaysia and East Timor will cease with the visit, Syed Hamid said.

It was earlier reported that the East Timor leaders felt that Malaysia was unsympathetic towards their plight despite the country's participation in the United Nations activities in East Timor.

When asked if East Timor will seek membership in the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean), Syed Hamid said he thinks it is too early to consider such a request.

"Their main aim is to be a responsible member of regional as well as the international community. I do not think membership of Asean is in their priority list. They have to first establish a government.

"Their priority is a little different. Definitely, they would be interested in the future. It is good to establish relations ... because without that, we will be ignorant in what is happening in each other's countries," he added.

On another issue, Syed Hamid said Malaysia's position on the situation in Iraq is clear.

"We want to establish a solution for the Iraq impasse that will take Iraq out of the inhumanity and sufferings which have gone on for almost a decade.

"The United Nations Special Commission for the Disarmament (Unscm) suffered a credibility problem. So, when we took part in the discussions for a new resolution, our view is that a new approach should be found even though we abstain because we feel that the resolution did not go deep enough to address the sufferings of the Iraqis," he said.

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