

03 MAR 2000

Hamid-Estrada

PHILIPPINE PRESIDENT PROPOSES TO VISIT MALAYSIA

PUTRAJAYA, March 3 (Bernama) -- Philippine President Joseph Estrada proposes to make an official visit to Malaysia to strengthen bilateral ties, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today.

He said Estrada's intention was conveyed to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad by Philippine Foreign Secretary Domingo Siazon when he called on the prime minister at his office, here.

The date and itinerary for Estrada's visit would be arranged as soon as possible, Syed Hamid told reporters after the call.

Siazon is here to attend the fourth Malaysia-Philippines Joint Commission Meeting.

"We will find a suitable date for the visit for the convenience of both leaders," Syed Hamid said, adding that the visit might take place this year.

Syed Hamid said Siazon extended Estrada's regards to the prime minister and informed him of the president's intention to make an official visit to Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir agreed to the visit, he said.

Malaysia-Philippine relation has been described as strained following unprecedented issues taking place including Estrada's remarks against Dr Mahathir over the sacking of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim

Malaysia also voiced its dissatisfaction towards Estrada for meeting Anwar's wife, Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail, when the president was in Kuala Lumpur for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) forum in November 1998.

Estrada, who was elected president in July 1998, irked Malaysia when he received Wan Azizah at the Malacanang Presidential Palace in Manila in May last year.

Manila on the other hand was also sour towards Malaysia for allegedly erecting structures on Spratly islands in the South China Sea.

However, Dr Mahathir has said that the Peninjau and Siput reefs and shoals on which Malaysia has erected the structures are in Malaysian territory.

Malaysia and the Philippines are among the several countries partly or wholly claiming the Spratly group of islands.

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