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MILF-Peace

CEASEFIRE ACCORD REACHED BETWEEN MANILA AND MILF

CYBERJAYA, Aug 7 (Bernama) -- The Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have reached a ceasefire agreement and are expected to sign it later today.

MILF chief negotiator Murad Ebrahim said the peace pact was reached by the two parties after a one-hour meeting held here early this morning. The Philippine government and MILF had over the past two weeks worked hard at the negotiation table here to reach this historic accord.

"We will now arrange a formal signing of documents in front of Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today," he said after the meeting.

Arroyo, who arrived here today for a three-day working visit, is expected to meet Dr Mahathir this evening for a four-eye meeting and the agreement is expected to be signed after the talks between the two leaders in Putrajaya, the country's new administrative centre.

Murad said the two leaders would witness the signing of the agreement which would bring about a cessation of hostilities (implementing guidelines) between the Philippine government and the MILF.

He said the ceasefire would come into force immediately after the signing of the peace accord, bringing an end to nearly 30 years of revolt on the southern island of Mindanao.

The two parties also reached an agreement today to set up a coordinating committee for the cessation of hostilities. The committee would investigate violations of ceasefire and recommend punitive action against any violators.

"The ceasefire will be monitored by a team from the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), comprising members from Libya, Indonesia and Malaysia, and is open to other OIC member states.

"The agreement is a major breakthrough. We feel that the document is very important in order to realise the rehabilitation and development programmes in Mindanao," he added.

The ceasefire agreement sets the stage for the two sides to begin talks to cement lasting peace on the island.

The signing ceremony, to be held at 5pm, will also include documents on the reunification of the MILF with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), agreed here just days ago.

"There will be documents on unity with the MNLF and the MILF and the document on cessation of hostilities," Murad said.

The MILF split from the MNLF in 1978, and the MNLF has already reached a peace agreement with Manila.

A previous ceasefire between the government and the MILF was in place from 1997 to 2000, until Arroyo's predecessor, Joseph Estrada, decided that the rebels were consolidating their position and ordered a fresh offensive.

-- BERNAMA

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