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Manila-Mediators

MANILA UNDECIDED ON M'SIAN MEDIATORS

MANILA, June 9 (Bernama) -- The Philippine authorities and the Moro bandits are locked in a dispute over whether to allow two Malaysians to negotiate for the release of 13 hostages.

Speaking to reporters today, National Security Adviser Roilo Golez ruled out dragging Malaysia into what he called an "internal matter" of the Philippines.

"Why Malaysia? We Filipinos can handle this by ourselves," he said.

The Abu Sayyaf had threatened to behead the three American hostages on Sunday unless Malaysian ex-senator Sairin Karno and businessman Yusuf Hamdan act as mediators.

Chief negotiator William Castillo said he talked to Abu Sayyaf spokesman Abu Sabaya three times this morning via satellite phone as part of the negotiation process.

He said the bandits, holed up in the mountains of Basilan province along with the hostages, still insisted on negotiating with the two Malaysians.

"However, Sairin already said he cannot interfere without Malaysia's approval. And we know that Prime Minister Mahathir (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) said they won't," Castillo said.

Because of this, he said: "We're looking into the possibility of a foreign negotiator."

Senate President Aquilino Pimentel also confirmed reports about the possible entry of Malaysian emissaries.

"I understand there are suggestions about a Malaysian negotiator. My information is that the Malaysian negotiator was also involved in the Sipadan negotiations," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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