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Syed Hamid-Arroyo

M'SIA HOPES MANILA-MILF ACCORD CAN BE SIGNED DURING ARROYO'S VISIT

KUALA LUMPUR, July 31 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is hopeful that a peace accord between Manila and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is ready for signing during Philippine President Gloria Arroyo Macapagal's visit to Malaysia next week.

Being convenor of their second round of talks, Malaysia hoped that both sides could finalise negotiations before Arroyo's visit here scheduled from Aug 7 to 9, the Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today.

"Now that they have chosen Malaysia and the PM (Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) has agreed to play host for them, perhaps we can expect to see the signing of an MoU between the warring sides," he said.

Syed Hamid told reporters this after briefing Information Department officers on current international issues and Malaysia's foreign policy here today.

Philippine and MILF negotiators started talks in Port Dickson a week ago on ways to implement a truce that both sides agreed to during earlier rounds of discussion in Libya.

Asked what Malaysia expected out of hosting the Port Dickson talks, Syed Hamid said both sides envisaged bringing development to Mindanao, the Moro heartland, and this could only be done if peace and security prevailed.

"Towards this end, what we did is only to bring them to the negotiation table," Syed Hamid said.

A fruitful talk would bring about peace and Malaysia could later help in the socio-economic development of southern Philippines, he said.

Arroyo's visit here would be her first to an Asean member country since assuming the presidency, he said.

Choosing Malaysia as the first leg of her regional tour underscored the close bilateral economic, social and cultural ties that both countries enjoyed, Syed Hamid said.

Her visit would provide avenues for the Philippine and Malaysian leadership to discuss issues relating to maritime boundary, influx of Filipinos to Malaysia besides regional and international cooperation, Syed Hamid said.

Likewise, the inclusion of corporate figures in Arroyo's entourage would augur well for Malaysian businessmen intending to go into joint ventures in the Philippines, he said.

"We most welcome the corporate sector delegates. Moreover Malaysian businessmen have already invested substantially in the Philippine hotel, tourism and industrial sectors," Syed Hamid added.

-- BERNAMA

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