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`No approval for any Malaysian to negotiate with Abu Sayyaf'

PUTRAJAYA, Tues. - The Government has not given its sanction to former senator Datuk Sairin Karno and businessman Yusof Hamdan to negotiate the release of hostages held by the Abu Sayyaf.

National Intelligence Committee director Che Moin Umar said the two did not receive any endorsement from the Government to become negotiators in the Abu Sayyaf kidnapping.

"As far as we are concerned, these two act on their own, believed with the support from certain quarters."

He was speaking to reporters at the Dos Palmas, Pulau Palawan, Philippines. He, however, did not disclose details.

Also present were the National Security Division deputy director-general Muhamad Mustapha and Wisma Putra (Southeast Asia Division) representative Mohd Zulkepli Mohd Noor.

In this respect, Che Moin urged the media to weigh the bearing of this issue being highlighted by the printed and electronic media on the Philippine Government.

"By highlighting this issue, it will only affect the ties between both countries since the Philippine Government has repeatedly stated that it can handle its internal problem.

"So far there is no formal request from President Gloria Arroyo's Government asking for Malaysian negotiators," he said.

It was reported earlier that the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government would consider sending Malaysian negotiators should it receive any official request from Manila.

Meanwhile, Philippine troops were reported to be relentlessly pursuing the Abu Sayyaf rebels who were holding two American and 21 Filipino hostages.

Former hostage Francis Ganson, 50, said his release was a gesture of goodwill to convince Manila to bring in Malaysian mediators. He was released with two others - 13-year-old Kimberly Jao Uy and Imam Mohaimin Latip.

Che Moin said the media should look into why these two private mediators, Sairin and Yusof, seemed "beriya-iyaya (so enthusiastic)" to become negotiators.

"Now the grassroots level has begun to question their motives."

Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) Youth chief Almudin Kaida had urged the Government to probe into the alleged contacts between the two Malaysians and the Abu Sayyaf rebels.

On seamen held captive following the spate of hijackings reported off Sabah recently, Che Moin said so far there was no evidence indicating that the kidnapers involved Philippine security personnel.

The kidnapers, suspected to be members of the Abu Sayyaf, had taken hostage the crew of four fishing boats near the Malaysia-Philippine border on June 12.

The crew contacted the boat owners and negotiations to secure their release started.

Crewmen from three fishing boats were subsequently freed after their owners paid ransom amounting to between RM15,000 and RM5,000 for each boat. However, no official report had been lodged.

The owner of the fourth boat contacted police and related his predicament.

A special team was despatched and they found the three boats on Bakungan Kecil island which is within Malaysian territory.

It was understood they found the three on Bakungan Besar island (within Philippine territory) and assisted in sending them to Bakungan Kecil island, a 20-minute boat ride away.

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