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Talks

P'PINES EYES KL, JAKARTA TO HOST PEACE TALKS

MANILA, May 10 (Bernama) -- The Philippines is eyeing either Malaysia or Indonesia to host its peace talks with Moro rebels next month, a senior aide of President Gloria Arroyo said today.

Presidential Assistant for Mindanao Jesus Dureza said the two Asean neighbours had offered to host the talks in their desire to help the Philippines attain enduring peace in the south.

"This means that our neighbours are with us in pursuing peace in Mindanao," he said.

Dureza, a former journalist, heads the government panel that will negotiate peace with the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The official said the offers of Malaysia and Indonesia sent "very positive messages" abroad since the two nations are members of the influential Organisation of Islamic Conference.

He said the offers made by Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta should not be interpreted as intervention in the internal affairs of the Philippines.

"These are offers of partnership and assistance," he said.

But, he said, the Manila government and the MILF had yet to agree on the venue of the talks.

Manila had earlier chosen Kuala Lumpur as the venue of the coming talks after it successfully hosted last March a secret meeting of Manila and MILF panels that yielded positive results.

The Kuala Lumpur meeting, held under the auspices of Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, resulted in the signing of a "framework agreement" by both sides.

Indonesia made the offer on the request of MILF chairman Hashim Salamat, a classmate of Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid at the University of Cairo in Egypt.

-- BERNAMA

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