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Mahathir-Arroyo

ARROYO SURPRISED BY MAHATHIR'S RESIGNATION

MANILA, June 26 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's decision to step down next year has surprised President Gloria Arroyo, her spokesman said today.

Acting Press Secretary Silvestre Afable told reporters that Arroyo did not expect Mahathir to resign this early, but said this should not affect regional political stability.

"As regards the continuity of leadership in Malaysia, we have no doubt that Malaysia is a very stable nation so that its stability and that of its relationship with Asean is not affected," the official spokesman said.

Like the Philippines, Malaysia is one of Asean's founding members which also includes Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Afable noted that Arroyo "has a very close personal relationship with Prime Minister Mahathir".

"He has been very helpful to us especially in the peace process in Mindanao and we are somewhat surprised by his decision," he said.

Malaysia hosted peace talks between Manila and the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front since last year which led to the signing of a ceasefire accord.

It also sealed last month an agreement with the Philippines and Indonesia for joint efforts in fighting international terrorism.

-- BERNAMA

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