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Syed Hamid-Philippines

NO NEWS YET ON RAMOS MEETING PM, SAYS SYED HAMID

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 30 (Bernama) -- The Foreign Ministry has yet to receive news from the Philippine Government on the proposed visit by former Philippine president Fidel Ramos to meet Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on the plight of Filipino deportees from Sabah.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said he had not receive any information from the Malaysian Embassy in Manila on Ramos' visit as reported by the media of the two countries.

"So far, there is no confirmation yet from our embassy there and no request, if there is any we'll consider it. It's up to the prime minister whether to accept their visit or otherwise," he told reporters today.

Philippine President Gloria Arroyo was reported to have said that she was sending Ramos to meet Dr Mahathir after seeing for herself the "appalling conditions" of Filipino deportees in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, southern Philippines.

The Philippine media reported that thousands of deportees, including women and children suffered "inhumane treatment" by Malaysian police in Sabah.

He said the visit was not necessary if it was to discuss the illegal immigrants' issue but if it followed procedures, it was up to Dr Mahathir to accept him.

"We don't know the aim of the visit, but if they insist on sending and still want to meet (Dr Mahathir), we want to see why such things happen, we cannot say we do not want to accept their visit," he said.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia was prepared to discuss the causes of the influx of illegal immigrants from neighbouring countries to Malaysia and seek an amicable solution to the problem.

"I think the main issue to put forward is why the exodus of illegal immigrants happen, and why many citizens of foreign countries come in droves to Malaysia. This showed there is problem in terms of economic development, particularly in southern Philippines," he said.

He said Malaysia understood the problems faced by neighbouring countries and was prepared to help by contributing towards the development of southern Philippines by investing there provided the Philippine Government could provide the security guarantees.

"The problem is caused by absence of development in southern Philippines, they have no work, no economic development and hence they cross over to Malaysia and the nearest place for them is Sabah," he said.

Syed Hamid also said Malaysia was ready to accept citizens of neighbouring countries if they come in legally.

"Many Filipinos staying for years in Sabah have been given citizenship. If they used legal channels, they will not face the problems like now. Only after incidents like this happen, our contributions go unnoticed," he said.

On media reports in the Philippines that thousands of illegal immigrants from the Philippines, including women and children suffered inhumane treatment from Malaysian police, he said views of the Philippine media should not be magnified.

"If we want to reply to all, it's difficult, we need to focus attention and see this matter in terms of the background and actual situation.

"In the course of discharging the duties, perhaps such incidents may have happen but it did not happen due to victimisation, brutality or

inhumane actions," he said.

Syed Hamid said the issue would not harm the bilateral ties between the two countries and Malaysia would continue its operations to deport illegal immigrants with the knowledge of the countries involved.

On the Philippines' claim on Sabah as raised by the Philippine media, he said the sovereignty and independence of Malaysia should not be questioned.

"We need to put forth our issue. Nobody can dispute the sovereignty and integrity of our country recognised by the United Nations.

"The question is not territorial dispute but deportation of illegal immigrants.

"Don't divert attention to unrelated issues," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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