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Defence Ministry preparing to bring back Malaysians from Middle East

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Defence Ministry has been instructed to make preparations to bring back all Malaysians in Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries if war breaks out, said acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"This will be done if developments in Iraq pose a danger to Malaysians. The Foreign Ministry will provide information on Malaysian citizens staying in these countries to the Defence Ministry," he said.

Speaking after chairing the Barisan Nasional management committee meeting at the Putra World Trade Centre today, Abdullah said Malaysia viewed the situation in Iraq seriously and would take necessary action to safeguard its citizens.

On BN's 50th anniversary celebration, Abdullah said a series of activities including a large-scale rally would be held in August, beginning in Kuala Lumpur.

Programmes highlighting BN's success in power-sharing would be organised.

Asked whether the celebration was a farewell to BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, he said: "No, this is just a celebration to mark BN's success in governing the country and building it into what it is today."

Abdullah was also asked about Philippine President Gloria Arroyo Macapagal's move to despatch her special envoy Roberto Romulo to ask Kuala Lumpur to help convince the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front to return to formal peace talks despite the renewed fighting.

Malaysia was due to host peace talks between MILF and Manila later this year but this was stalled after the military overran an MILF enclave, near the southern town of Pikit last month.

To this, Abdullah said: "If possible we do not want war and both parties should cease fire while we are in the process to solve their problems."

On the postponement of the execution of a Filipino convicted of drug dealing in Sabah, Abdullah said he had explained the situation to Romulo and had told him that everything was done according to the law. The accused had been given facilities for defence, including hiring a lawyer.

Romulo, sent by Arroyo to seek Malaysia's help in reviving peace talks with Muslim separatists in the southern Philippines, said he took up Andy Baginda's case in his meeting with Abdullah.

Baginda, a Philippine national, was convicted in 1997 and sentenced to death for drug dealing but was given a 30-day stay.