

Najib Expected In Manila Thursday For Historic Peace Accord Signing

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MANILA, March 26 (Bernama) -- The Malacanang Palace will bear witness to a historic event tomorrow, when the Philippine Government (GPH) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) sign a Malaysia-brokered peace treaty that will see power sharing in the Muslim south towards a long-lasting peace and prosperity.

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak will be in Manila tomorrow when the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro is inked after what officials described as "arduous negotiations" spanning 17 years.

Najib's presence in Manila to witness the signing of the final peace accord will not go unnoticed as he has cancelled several overseas trips, including those to Mauritius, Abu Dhabi and Doha, to deal with the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines (MAS) Flight MH370 with 239 people on board on March 8.

Malaysia came on board in 2001 to help resolve the more than four decades of conflict in southern Philippines that has claimed over 100,000 lives.

Underscoring the importance of the peace deal, the Malaysian leader was also here when the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro was signed on Oct 15, 2012.

Putting things into perspective, Malaysian facilitator in the peace process Tengku Datuk Abdul Ghafar Tengku Mohamed said Najib's attendance tomorrow would take place amid the gloom surrounding the disappearance of Flight MH370.

Abdul Ghafar said this would send a signal on how Kuala Lumpur viewed the significance of the peace deal which was hammered out with a view to achieving a politically-negotiated settlement to the conflict in the resource-rich but impoverished region of Mindanao.

The Boeing 777-200ER vanished under mysterious circumstances during a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing about an hour after take-off from the Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

An ashen-faced Najib then announced to a stunned world on March 24 - 17 days after the disappearance of the Malaysian jetliner - that based on satellite data analysis, the flight "ended in the southern Indian Ocean".

Abdul Ghafar noted that Malaysia's approach to conflict management as far as the southern

Philippines was concerned was not about finding a quick-fix to the problem like what seemed to be the case for other trouble-hit spots in other parts of the world.

"The agreement goes to the root causes of the problem, the grievances of the people. That's why it has taken a long time to reach this point," he told members of the Malaysian media covering the event in the Philippine capital.

In undertaking his task as facilitator, Abdul Ghafar pointed out that he had to understand what he described as the "inner feelings" of both parties in efforts to carve out the peace deal that paved the way for the birth of an autonomous region of Bangsamoro.

Meanwhile, Malaysian Ambassador to the Philippines Datuk Mohd Zamri Mohd Kassim said Najib would be joined on the one-day working visit by wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, as well as Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman.

The envoy said Najib was also scheduled to call on President Benigno Aquino III and hosted to a dinner by the Philippine leader.

The agreement will be signed, among others, by Miriam Coronel Ferrer in her capacity as head of the GPH peace panel, and MILF panel chairman Mohagher Iqbal.

In a statement issued ahead of the signing, Ferrer said the peace agreement would be a "short five-page, 12-point text that will formalise the totality of the different agreements that have been achieved" to comprise the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro.

She noted that the peace pact was important, not only for the Bangsamoro, but the people of Mindanao and all other Filipino citizens who had all to gain as one country pursuing its unfinished task of nation-building.

It was reported that under the accord, MILF had agreed to abandon its armed struggle and instead, work on creating the new Bangsamoro political entity in Mindanao.

The autonomous region is also eyeing more control of its resources and revenue.

In KUALA LUMPUR, a foreign ministry statement said Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob and senior government officials would also be in Najib's delegation. "The visit will give the prime minister and President Aquino the opportunity to continue their discussions towards consolidating bilateral relations in the mutual and regional interests," it said.

It would also reflect Malaysia's continued commitment in helping to ensure and maintain peace and security in the region, it added.

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