

Peace talks with Reds resume next month

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Formal peace talks between the government and the communist National Democratic Front (NDF) are expected to resume early next month after the two panels reached an interim peace agreement (IPA).

Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III, who also serves as government peace panel chairman, yesterday reported that the government peace panel and NDF negotiators have already come up with an IPA.

“There is ongoing backchannel talks and apparently there is a forward movement and our panel members, including the NDF panel members, have come up with a preliminary peace agreement,” Bello said in an interview.

Bello said the IPA is expected to “graduate” into a coordinated unilateral ceasefire.

“Once they come home (from Europe), they will present the agreement to the President for his approval because this will already pave the way for the formal resumption of talks,” Bello noted.

Bello said the government peace panel is exerting efforts to meet President Duterte’s 60-day deadline for the forging of a peace agreement with the communist group.

“Hopefully the formal resumption (of peace talks) could happen first or second week of June because we have a timeframe,” he pointed out.

Bello expressed hope that the government peace panel and the NDF can sign the peace agreement before the end of June.

According to Bello, they are also looking into the possibility of holding the formal peace talks with the NDF in the country as President Duterte wishes.

Duterte has expressed preference for the talks to happen in the country with Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founder Jose Ma. Sison coming from the Netherlands where he has been on self-imposed exile for decades, Bello said.

“Let’s find out if that is possible,” he added.

Bello earlier reported that the government peace panel was holding backchannel negotiations with the NDF in preparation for the formal resumption of talks.

Aside from the IPA, they are also working on a possible amnesty proclamation to be extended to the NDF, CPP and its armed wing New People’s Army subject to the concurrence of Congress. — Mayen Jaymalin, Jose Rodel Clapano, Christina Mendez, Jaime Laude, Gilbert Bayoran