

PNoy to leave for Vladivostok with 66 officials

Sara Fabunan | September 07, 2012

President Benigno Aquino III, together with 66 other government officials and business leaders, leave for Vladivostok, Russia, today to attend the 20th Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit.

Presidential spokesman Edwin Lacierda said the delegation would include Cabinet secretaries Albert del Rosario of Foreign Affairs, newly-designated Interior and Local Government secretary Manuel Roxas, representing the Transportation and Communication Department; Cesar Purisima of Finance, Gregory Domingo of Trade and Industry, Jose Rene Almendras of Energy, and Miguel Perez-Rubio, chief of the presidential protocol.

“The business delegation, I have no copy yet but we will release it as soon as I have that,” Lacierda said on Thursday.

He said the President’s delegation will fly to Russia via chartered flights and will arrive at Vladivostok International Airport at 9:00 p.m. (Russian time).

Twenty other world leaders are expected to show up during the summit, which will be highlighted by the Apec leaders’ meeting on Sept. 8-9 on Russky Island.

Last week, Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Laura del Rosario confirmed that Chinese president Hu Jintao had requested a bilateral meeting with President Aquino at the Apec meeting.

But Lacierda said the Chinese foreign ministry and Foreign Affairs had yet to confirm the meeting between the two Asian leaders.

“You must remember that it is the Chinese side who asked for the bilateral talks. So we will confirm the meeting as soon as it has been ironed out by both the DFA and the Chinese Foreign Ministry.”

The Philippines, Vietnam and recently Japan clashed with China over Beijing's aggressive territorial claims on both the South China Sea and the East China Sea, which faces Japan.

Three other countries—Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei—have overlapping claims on the islands.

Earlier reports said the countries involved in the conflict were hoping to iron out their differences during the Apec summit.

But Justin Logan of the Washington Cato Institute said that the issue might further divide those countries if it was discussed during the summit.

He cited as an example the “sour outcome” of the 45th Association of Southeast Asian Nation Ministers Meeting where foreign ministry leaders failed to issue a joint communique.

Lacierda, however, said there was no basis for the apprehensions of some people since the 21 world leaders would mostly talk about the economy and how they could help each other.

“I don't think so. This is primarily an economic summit so I don't believe that it should be a hindrance to a discussion among the members of the Apec,” Lacierda said.

But he said President Aquino was expected to advance the country's interests, including its sovereignty over its islands.

“We will always have to advance our national interest. That's of course, the primary concern of each and every nation and in relation to trade and economic interests”, he said.

Expected to welcome the president's party are officials of the Foreign Ministry Affairs of the Russian Federation, the governor of the Primorsky Krai region in Vladivostok and Philippine Embassy officials led by Ambassador to Moscow Alejandro Mosqueura, Charge d' Affaires Dinno Oblena and Consul General Yuri Kostyukov of the Philippine Consulate.

A day after his arrival, president Aquino will have separate one-on-one meetings with leaders of other countries, as arranged by their foreign ministries. These include heads of states of Singapore, Chile and Vietnam.

Aside from the bilateral meetings on Saturday, Mr. Aquino is also scheduled to attend the APEC leaders retreat session in the afternoon. Later, he will participate in a dialogue with his fellow leaders in the APEC Business Advisory Council.