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RMAF to evacuate Malaysians in Solomons

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TWO Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) C130H aircraft will leave for Solomon Islands today as part of the mission to evacuate Malaysians stranded on the troubled islands off the Pacific ocean.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the Government decided yesterday to despatch the two aircraft, nicknamed Charlie, to rescue Malaysians as well as some Filipinos on the islands.

"The two aircraft, which can accommodate 200 people, will leave for the Solomon Islands tomorrow and will stop-over at Papua New Guinea to pick up some Filipinos who have escaped from the war-torn islands," he told newsmen after welcoming home Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad from his one-week working visit to Japan in Subang yesterday.

However, Syed Hamid could not determine when all the Malaysians will be evacuated from Solomon Islands.

Asked whether it was the Government's decision to despatch the two aircraft, Syed Hamid said the decision was also at the request of Malaysians on the islands.

"At one time, the Solomon Government itself wanted foreigners to leave the islands. Thus, we think that we should send our aircraft to bring back our people from the islands," he said.

He also did not discount the possibility that some Malaysians have already fled to Papua New Guinea using aircraft of other countries, including Australia. "They (Malaysians) can either use the aircraft of other nations or wait for our RMAF aircraft tomorrow," he said.

On June 6, fighting broke out between rival rebels in the Solomon islands. A group of rebels had seized Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu at gun point and demanded that he resign.

The Malaysian High Commission in Port Moresby said some 150 Malaysians have reported to the High Commission. A total of 100 Malaysians are in Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands and the rest in Malaita and several other islands in its vicinity.

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