

Arroyo to send Ramos for talks with Dr M

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MANILA: President Gloria Arroyo is sending former president Fidel Ramos to Malaysia to discuss with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad the plight of deportees from Sabah.

Senior officials, asking not to be named, said Arroyo is taking the move after seeing for herself the "appalling conditions" of deportees in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi.

Arroyo flew to Bongao to meet the thousands of deportees, including women and children who reportedly suffered "inhuman treatment" by Malaysian police in Sabah.

She distributed medicines and food supplies to the deportees and took time to talk to them and hear their complaints.

Officials said Arroyo wants Ramos

to discuss with Mahathir ways and means to ensure an "orderly and humanly" deportation of undocumented Filipinos from Sabah.

The former president has assumed the role of an elder statesman since he finished his term in 1996, travelling to various countries on speaking engagements and goodwill missions.

While he was president from 1992 to 1996, Ramos had numerous meetings with Mahathir, which led to a surge in Malaysian investments in the Philippines.

About 1,500 Filipinos, looking gaunt and famished, arrived on the remote southern Philippine island of Bangao from Malaysia yesterday as protests erupted in Manila over reports of infant deaths in Kuala Lumpur's crackdown on illegal immigrants.

Arroyo mingled with the latest batch of deportees, offering words of sympathy as they arrived aboard a Philippine navy ship in Bongao.

In **Kulim**, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Zainal Abidin Zin said the government has started an investigation into the allegation by Arroyo that Filipino illegals awaiting deportation were mistreated.

He said the ministry convened a meeting yesterday on the allegation.

The ministry would reserve its comment on the allegation pending the result of the investigation in two or three days, he said after opening Family Friendly Day for inmates at a drug rehabilitation centre.

The ministry would give its official reply if there was a request from the Philippine government. Agencies