

# Philippines team due to inspect detention centres

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KOTA KINABALU: A Philippine government team is due to arrive here from Manila over the next few days to inspect conditions of Filipino nationals being held at immigration detention centres.

Philippine Embassy second secretary Giovanni Palec said arrangements were also being made for the team, which is headed by presidential adviser Nur Jaafar, to meet Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat apart from inspecting the detention centres at Menggatal near here and those in Sandakan and Tawau.

He said the team would also try to meet Sabah Police Commissioner Datuk Ramli Yusuff, Immigration Department director Abdullah Sani and Federal Special Task Force chief Mohd Ghazali Ahmad.

When asked how long the inspection team would be in Sabah, Palec said it had not been fixed.

Apart from Nur Jaafar, who is also the congressman for Tawi Tawi, the team will also comprise Labour Under Secretary Lucy Lazo, Social Welfare Region IX director Parisia Taradji and a representative each from the Philippine Department of Defence and Department of Health.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said on Saturday that the Government had agreed to a request from President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo for a temporary halt in the deportation of Filipino illegal immigrants from Sabah.

He said the repatriation of the illegals would resume after Philippine government officials inspected the detention centres and were satisfied that their nationals were not ill-treated there.

In Manila, two Philippine Senators blamed the Arroyo administration for the disorder in the deporta-

tion of Filipino nationals from Sabah.

Senator Aquilino Pimentel was quoted as saying that Philippine officials tasked with receiving the deportees appeared to have been "sleeping on the job" noting that the repatriations of the immigrants had been going on since April but they had failed to prepare a contingency plan.

Fellow Senator Tessie Aquino Oreta noted that the Malaysian Government had issued warnings against illegal immigrants more than four months ago and said the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) had done nothing to prepare the Philippine government for the exodus.

She said that the DFA had also failed to initiate a campaign in Sabah to inform the country's nationals about Malaysia's amnesty for illegal immigrants and what steps they should take if they chose to go home.