

# Deported girl reunited with dad

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KOTA KINABALU: The father of the 13-year-old girl who returned to Sabah after being mistakenly deported to the Philippines six months ago had a tearful reunion with his daughter at the Princess Anne Children's Home hours after her arrival here on Monday.

State Social Services Minister Datuk Raymond Tan said yesterday the man had been anxiously waiting to meet his daughter and after the reunion had asked Welfare Department officials when he could take her home.

"The girl had also asked whether she could go home with her father. Our staff told her that they would have to wait a little longer," he said, adding that his ministry had assigned a social worker to act as the girl's companion.

Tan said with the social worker's guidance, the girl was slowly adjusting to life at the welfare home in Likas near here.

"We need to give her time to settle down. She has gone through so much, having to deal with so many strangers over the past few months," he said.

He added that the girl had developed a rapport with the social worker from his ministry who went to Manila more than a week ago to arrange for her return.

Tan said the social worker also accompanied the girl on the flight home on Monday.

He said it was also fortunate that the Filipino social worker who had been taking care of the girl had also accompanied her on her return to Sabah.

"At least there are some familiar faces around her," he said, adding that welfare officials were seeking the help of the police to contact the girl's mother, sisters and other family members.

He added that the presence of relatives would help the girl adjust to life in Sabah as police continued their investigations into her claims that she was raped by guards at the temporary Immigration detention centre in Menggatal near here.

The girl, who was reportedly from a broken home, was rounded up while wandering around the streets of the city during the *Ops Nyah II Bersepadu* crackdown against illegal immigrants early this year.

She was sent to the detention centre after she could not produce any documents.

In June, she was deported to the Philippines where she told officials she had been raped, prompting president Gloria Arroyo to contact Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad over the matter.

Police immediately set up a special team to probe the claims. During the course of their investigations they discovered that the girl was a Malaysian.

Yesterday, Tan said welfare officials also needed to meet the girl's family to plan what she would be doing once the police had completed their investigations.

"Providing her shelter and food is not a problem. But this is only a temporary arrangement.

"The question now is her future. We will help her however much we can," he said.