

Manila has confidence in KL's handling of alleged rape victim case

Not 1 2 DEC 2002

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — The Philippine Government has full confidence in Malaysia's handling of the case of the 13-year-old girl who alleged she was raped while being held at an Immigration detention centre in Sabah.

Philippine Social Welfare Secretary Corazon Soliman said she was convinced that the welfare of the girl (identified only by her pseudonym "Angelica") would be taken care of, and that justice would be pursued.

"We have faith in the investigation, what more with the Attorney-General supervising its progress."

She said it was not the Philippines' intention to intervene in Malaysia's domestic matters, but it was concerned about the child.

Soliman was on an official visit to the National Unity and Social Development Ministry to discuss exchange programmes that could be implemented in both countries, unity processes, social development issues and children's rights.

On Monday, Soliman escorted the girl on a flight to Kota Kinabalu after both Governments agreed to work together to find justice for her.

"We acknowledge Malaysia's capabilities and a lot can be learned," she said after a meeting with her Malaysian counterpart, Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman.

Soliman also said the Philippines was not obliged to apologise to Malaysia for the strongly-worded letter from President Gloria Arroyo to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mahathir Mohamad in October, when the country's officials presumed she was a Filipina.

"I don't think we need to apologise, we have a respectful relationship and

are happy that the girl would be well taken care of. It would not in any way sour bilateral relations," she said.

She added that in a meeting she had with officials from the Prime Minister's office, it had been made clear that the apology was not an issue that Malaysia would want to press on.

Siti Zaharah said investigation to determine legal rights over the girl and other welfare matters has begun.

The court will later make an order on the child's care and protection, based on reports from social officers and counsellors.

In **Kota Kinabalu**, State Community Development and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Raymond Tan Shu Kiah said the girl would live with her family eventually.

"She has now settled down and can communicate with anybody, but for the time being, she is only allowed to meet close relatives," he said.

Angelica's 76-year-old wheelchair-bound father who is blind and a sister had already met her. Tan's Ministry was making attempts to locate her mother and other siblings.

Police detained the girl in July after she was found wandering here without any identification documents and was placed at the detention centre in Menggatal where she was allegedly raped.

Thinking that she was a Filipina, Malaysian authorities deported her to the Philippines in September. She triggered a diplomatic row between the Philippines and Malaysia when she told authorities in southern Philippines that she was raped repeatedly by policemen at a detention centre.