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Sabah-Deportation

536 REMAINING FILIPINO ILLEGALS TO BE DEPORTED SOON, SAYS ENVOY

KOTA KINABALU, Sept 5 (Bernama) -- The Manila fact-finding mission headed by presidential adviser for Muslim affairs, Nur Jaafar, said the remaining 536 Filipinos being held at the temporary detention centres in Sabah will be deported as soon as possible.

"As soon as possible, as soon as we return to Manila. We can assure your government and your people that we are going to bring back our citizens," he told a press conference before the fact-finding team returned to Manila.

The 10-member delegation headed by Nur Jaafar comprising officials from the Health Ministry, Defence and Foreign Affairs Departments, Social Welfare Office and the Philippines Ambassador to Malaysia, Jose Brillantes, were here since Monday.

The team visited their citizens being held at temporary detention centres in Menggatal, near here, Tawau and Sandakan during their four-day visit to Sabah.

Datuk Abdul Ghapur Salleh, Minister in the Chief Minister's Department, who also attended the press conference, said the state government and the fact-finding mission have agreed to send back the Filipinos to the Philippines.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said last week that Malaysia agreed to Philippine President Gloria Arroyo's request to suspend the deportation of its citizens as she was sending a fact-finding team to check the conditions at the holding centres following reports of inhumane treatment of the illegals by Malaysian police.

Nur Jaafar also said his team was satisfied with the Malaysian Government for exerting all efforts to ease the hardship faced by the Filipinos at the detention centres.

Asked what steps would be taken by Manila to prevent its citizens from entering Sabah illegally, Nur Jaafar said: "That is why we have agreed to set up additional passport processing centres in our country."

He said the team had recommended that more diplomatic officials be sent to Malaysia, including to Sabah.

Brillantes said at present there were only 13 officials here to process the travelling documents of their citizens.

Nur Jaafar said about 27,000 Filipinos have returned to the Philippines since January.

Asked how many illegal Filipinos were in Sabah, he said: "According to the data given to us, there are about 300,000."

-- BERNAMA

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