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## Special task force to probe Filipino girl's rape allegation

Chok Suat Ling; Jasbir Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Federal police have set up a task force to investigate an allegation that a 13-year-old Filipino girl was raped while in detention in Kota Kinabalu.

The move follows a directive from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday for a swift and thorough investigation of the allegation which has been reported in the Philippine Press for the past few days.

Federal Criminal Investigation Department chief Datuk Salleh Mat Som said the report by the Philippine delegation, which probed conditions at detention camps in Sabah, had been converted into a police report to initiate investigations.

He said the task force, comprising officers from the Federal police sexual crimes and legal division, would be led by CID assistant director for special investigations Assistant Commissioner Takbir Ahmad and prosecution and legal officer Deputy Superintendent Yahya Ramli.

The team will be assisted by Interpol.

"Although Sabah police have already set up an investigation team, Federal police feel we can provide assistance.

"We would like to conduct a thorough investigation with the help of the Philippine authorities," he added.

The Philippine authorities had pledged support for the investigation, Salleh said after meeting the Philippine Embassy Minister and Consul General Luis Cruz at Bukit Aman today.

He said assistance from the Philippines was needed to interview the girl and record her statement.

The girl is currently in Zamboanga, southern Philippines.

Salleh said police had requested either the girl be brought back to Malaysia or for arrangements to be made for the task force to travel to the Philippines to interview her.

"At the moment, we need to verify the allegation and get details of the incident, such as where it happened and who was involved, so that the investigation can be conducted."

In addition, he said police would also need to gather corroborative and medical evidence to prepare investigation papers which would then be submitted to the Attorney General.

Salleh said police hoped to complete investigations into the case, which has been classified as rape, as soon as possible.

"We take the allegation very seriously ... especially because it involves the citizen of a neighbouring country who is a minor," he said.

Meanwhile, Cruz said he would be filing a report to the Philippine Government on the "swift, clear and decisive" action taken by the Malaysian Government on the issue.

"We will work closely with the Malaysian authorities," he said.

"We are pleased with Malaysia's swift action. It is best that this matter be brought to a close as soon as possible as we do not want this irritant to affect bilateral relations."

He said the Philippine Government would decide whether the girl would be interviewed there or brought to Malaysia.