

01 SEP 2002

Sabah-Immigrants

PHILIPPINE NAVY SHIPS WITH 234 IMMIGRANTS STILL AT PORT

SANDAKAN, Sept 1 (Bernama) -- Two Philippine naval vessels, DRP Bucolod and San Juan, were still at the Karamunting Port here late this evening although they were supposed to have left for home this morning with 234 immigrants deported by Malaysia.

The 234 illegal immigrants have already boarded the ships together with a group of immigrants which has chosen to return home voluntarily.

Sabah Ports Authority traffic and operations officer Awang Besar Ibrahim said the authorities of the two ships told him that the situation arose "because we are waiting for the outcome of negotiations between the Malaysian and Philippine governments" on the issue of deporting illegal immigrants.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia had agreed to temporarily halt the deportation of Filipino illegal immigrants at the request of Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

This was to allow Manila to send its officers to inspect detention camps following media reports on the alleged mistreatment of immigrants, he said.

Federal Special Task Force senior officer Ismail Zakaria said the last of the illegal immigrants boarded the ship at 5.40pm yesterday.

The immigrants, comprising 89 men, 62 women, 43 boys and 40 girls, were from the temporary detention centre in Menggatal, Kota Kinabalu.

-- BERNAMA

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