

31 AUG 2002

Mahathir-Philippines

MALAYSIA AGREES ON SHORT BREAK IN REPATRIATING PHILIPPINE ILLEGALS

SEPANG, Aug 31 (Bernama) -- Malaysia agrees to a temporary halt to the plan to deport illegal Filipino immigrants following a request from its President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"She (Arroyo) asked me whether we can take a short break in sending their people home. I agreed because they want to send somebody to see (how the illegals are treated before they are sent back)," he told the media after presenting prizes for the Merdeka Millennium Endurance race here today.

"I said you (Arroyo) can send somebody to see (how the Filipinos are treated). No problem," he said confirming a report which said he had received a telephone call from Arroyo yesterday on the issue.

Dr Mahathir said the short break in the deportation programme was not a shift from earlier decision to send back the illegals.

He said once the Philippine representatives had come and were satisfied that Malaysia did not ill-treat the Filipinos, the deportation would resume.

"We have made the decision (to deport illegal immigrants). We have postponed it to give them time to make the necessary arrangement. Now the period is over and it is time for them to go home, and they will go," he added.

The report about illtreating Filipino illegal immigrants who were being deported was not true, he said.

"There is nothing there. We have treated them (Filipino illegals) well and they have been living in this country for a long time. They have been sick in this country, ill in this country, and they have died in this country. It is not a phenomenon that is unusual," he said.

Therefore, the solution was to let the Philippine government representatives look at how those illegals had been treated, he said.

He said the Philippines did not express any disagreement about Malaysia's deportation plan.

-- BERNAMA

MSL MSL AO