

02 SEPT 2002
Chong-Immigrants
OPS AGAINST ILLEGALS TO CONTINUE- SABAH CM

KOTA KINABALU, Sept 2 (Bernama) -- The repatriation of illegal immigrants to the Philippines will be suspended but the operation against foreigners who do not have valid travel documents, including Filipinos, will continue, Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat said today.

"Basically the request from the Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is for Malaysia to halt the deportation process of Filipino nationals to give them the opportunity to see how the immigrants were treated while in detention," he told reporters here after chairing the State Security Committee meeting here.

On Saturday Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia had agreed to temporarily halt the deportation of Filipino illegal immigrants at the request of the Philippine President.

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

A team of officials led by presidential advisor Nur Jaafar would be arriving here from Manila this afternoon to see for itself the condition at the detention centres in Menggatal, near here as well as in Sandakan and Tawau in the east coast of Sabah.

The team comprising senior officials from the Labour and Employment, Health and Welfare and Defence departments would return to Manila on Thursday.

Chong, who is the Sabah State Security Committee Chairman, said: "This visit is to study and see the actual situation while in detention. Whether the situation is the same as pictured by the Philippine media is for them to assess."

The Chief Minister said Sabah welcomed the team of officials and would facilitate their visit to the three holding centres.

"We are very happy that they are coming to have a look at their own people here," Chong said.

Asked to comment on the alleged ill-treatment of Filipino illegals, Chong said: "We have said many times that we have never had any complaint from anybody either from the embassy or from the people who have stayed here for so long and enjoyed all the benefits and facilities."

"...If indeed we ill-treat them, then why is it that they do not want to go back? If that is the case, why will they want to come back here even without documentation? Common sense will tell you that this state must be a paradise for them, otherwise they will not want to come here," the Chief Minister said.

Chong said Sabah had adhered to established procedures pertaining to treatment of detainees.

"If anyone of them had health problem, we always have them undergo medical treatment. We have many instances where immediate attention has been given to those who were ill," he said.

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