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Filipino-Inspection

ARROYO'S ENVOY SAYS THEY ARE IN SABAH TO REMOVE IRRITANTS

KOTA KINABALU, Sept 2 (Bernama) -- The Philippines' presidential advisor for the Muslim community Nur Jaafar said today that he hopes to remove "some of the seeming irritants" arising from the deportation process of Filipino nationals from Malaysia.

Nur Jaafar, who arrived here with a nine-member delegation, said they would also be looking into how the deportation process could be simplified, such as by having more deportation points and not solely relying on Sandakan port.

"What we came here for is to ask for leniency and understanding...we share a common religion, tradition and culture. I see no reason why we cannot agree on a simplified process of deportation in order to alleviate further the sufferings of our citizens," he told reporters on arrival at the Kota Kinabalu International Airport, here.

He was met by Minister in the Chief Minister's Department Datuk Abdul Ghapur Salleh. Philippine ambassador to Malaysia Jose Brillantes was also present.

Nur Jaafar was accompanied by Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Arthur Brian as well as the undersecretaries for Health, Social Welfare and Labour and Employment, representatives from the Defence Department and media crews.

Asked on how the deportation could be simplified, Nur Jaafar said the deportees came from holding centres in Tawa and Kota Kinabalu but all were transported to Sandakan for deportation.

"The pressure is so much, considering the number. If we can improve it more, it would be in the best interest of our country," he said.

For example, he said, Filipino deportees being held in Tawau and Semporna could be sent directly to Sitangkai and Tawi-Tawi without taking them to Sandakan.

He said the Philippine government was prepared to send its naval vessels to pick up those deportees at ports other than Sandakan if the Malaysian government allowed them to do so.

Nur Jaafar said most of the complaints received from the deportees were on the hectic travel by land from the holding centres to Sandakan and then by sea to destinations in the southern Philippines.

Nur Jaafar, who was despatched by Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to Sabah following reports of alleged ill-treatment of deportees, said: "Our objective is to remove irritants between the two countries which some sectors of our society are taking advantage of.

"That is why we are very thankful to Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr) Mahathir Mohamad for having declared a moratorium on the deportation after having talks with President Arroyo," he said.

The team will call on the Yang Dipertua Negeri, Tun Sakaran Dandai, at Istana Negeri here tomorrow and then meet Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat. They will attend a security briefing in the afternoon before visiting a temporary holding centre in Menggatal, near here.

On Wednesday, the team will visit the Tawau holding centre before proceeding to Sandakan where they will visit two naval ships which were supposed to have left Karamunting Port yesterday with more than 400 deportees but have yet to do so.

On why the two naval ships have yet to set sail for the southern Philippines, Nur Jaafar said: "It is not because of our arrival. It is due

to the capacity of the vessel...it can still load some more and I don't see why we should be in a hurry," he said.

The delegation will leave for Manila on Thursday.

-- BERNAMA

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