

22 AUG 2002

Syed Hamid-Philippines

M'SIA TO ALLOW PHILIPPINE NAVAL SHIPS TO FILIPINOS HOME

PUTRAJAYA, Aug 22 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has given diplomatic clearance for the Philippines to use its naval ships to ferry home Filipino illegal immigrants from Sabah.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the clearance was conveyed to Philippine Foreign Secretary Blas F. Ople following a discussion on the deportation of Filipino illegal immigrants at their meeting, here, today.

Thousands of illegals are waiting to go home following the enforcement of the amended Immigration Act which provides for heavier penalties, including whipping, for illegal immigrants.

Syed Hamid said Ople had asked for Malaysia's cooperation to allow the deportation of its citizen to be conducted smoothly.

"Malaysia noted that it (deportation) will take time because of the problem of transportation and he (Ople) asked for cooperation to allow Philippine naval ships in to smoothen the process," he told reporters after the hour-long discussion.

Ople, who arrived here yesterday, is on a four-day familiarisation tour of Malaysia. This is his first visit here since his appointment as Philippine Foreign Secretary.

The naval ships would pick up the illegal Filipinos from Sandakan and ferry them to Zamboanga City and Tawi Tawi in the southern Mindanao island.

Syed Hamid said he told Ople that the amnesty, which ended on July 31, would not be extended and that any action taken against illegal immigrants was in accordance with the law.

"He had no objections to Malaysia's actions," he said.

Syed Hamid said they also discussed bilateral, trade and economic relations and the need to re-activate the Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines-East Asean Growth Area (Bimp-Eaga) following the economic recovery in the region.

He said Malaysia agreed that the Bimp-Eaga cooperation should be revived but the matter of infrastructure and security in the region must be tackled first to enable economic activities to be stepped up.

He said Ople also asked for joint patrols of the waters of both countries to be stepped up to safeguard security and prevent terrorism, piracy and intrusion by illegal immigrants.

Syed Hamid said he proposed that the Philippines speed up its programme to set up a consulate in Sabah to smoothen travel documentation for its citizens.

Asked for Ople's response to this, he said: "There was no firm response."

Syed Hamid also said that the Malaysia-Philippines Joint Commission meeting would be held in Davao in December.

He also informed Ople that the issue of the establishment of the Asean+3 secretariat was not over and expressed the hope that the Philippines would support Malaysia to make the secretariat a reality.

Malaysia's proposal that the Asean+3 secretariat be based in Kuala Lumpur was turned down at the recent Asean Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in Brunei on the ground that it would undermine the Asean secretariat in Jakarta.

Syed Hamid said Ople also extended an invitation to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir to visit the Philippines.

Syed Hamid, who later received Hungarian Deputy Foreign Minister Andras Barsony, said they discussed bilateral relations, economic cooperation and investments.

He said Hungary felt that Malaysia was a strategic and important country in the region and wanted bilateral relations and cooperation between the two countries to be stepped up.

Hungary also offered educational opportunities in technology and medicine to Malaysian students, he added.

-- BERNAMA

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