

Malaysia anticipates backlash over Misuari issue

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By Yusoff Ahmad

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat: Malaysia must be prepared for some backlash from the Moros of southern Philippines if denosed Muslim Mindanao governor Nur Misuari is deported against his wishes.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak said the Abu Sayyaf separatists, having lost Nur Misuari's support, are also likely to renew threats against Malaysian interests.

"We laud the taking back of Nur Misuari but the timing is important so as not to result in a backlash against Malaysian interests from his supporters.

"Manila is keen to uplift the living standards of the Moro people and the rebel groups, such as the Moro National Liberation Front and Abu Sayyaf, know that. However, they are still causing problems-so as to stay in power," Naniib said.

"We have increased our vigilance and are on high alert, anticipating worst case scenarios after Misuari's deportation, including an influx of Moro refugees and Abu Sayyaf terrorists

targeting Malaysian victims," Najib said after presenting diplomas to 138 military graduates of the 30th Armed Forces Staff Course for the year 2001 at the Defence Ministry auditorium today.

Misuari was arrested with six followers in a pre-dawn raid on Jampiras island, off Sabah, on Nov 24 for illegal entry.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday Friday that the Nur Misuari issue is a sensitive matter, which has put Malaysia in a spot.

In **IPOH** this evening, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai said investigations so far reveal that Misuari has no links with any criminal or militant group in the country.

Norian said Misuari is being held for illegal entry and as Mahathir has said, the former Mindanao governor will be deported as soon as the Philippine government gives the signal that it is ready to accept him.

Norian Mai said this to reporters after breaking fast with Raja di-Hilir Perak Raja Jaafar Raja Muda Musa and senior police officers at the police headquarters.