

Arroyo sends envoy to arrange Misuari's handover

MANILA, Fri: Philippine President Gloria Arroyo has dispatched a special envoy to Malaysia to arrange the handover of renegade Filipino Muslim leader Nur Misuari to Manila, officials said today.

It is believed Misuari will be repatriated around Christmas.

The 60-year-old former separatist guerilla leader was arrested in Sabah three weeks ago for illegal entry.

He fled there after Filipino troops crushed an armed rebellion by his followers on the island of Jolo.

Arroyo said she is sending her adviser, Norberto

Gonzales, to convey to Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad Manila's preference that Misuari's "cases" first be investigated by Kuala Lumpur.

But she said: "I don't want his (Mahathir's) administration to be under any domestic pressure.

"If it becomes a sensitive issue as far as the Muslim population of Malaysia is concerned, we are ready to take him (Misuari) back."

She refused to say when Kuala Lumpur and Manila intend Misuari's handover to take place, citing security reasons.

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But her national security adviser, Roilo Golez, said Misuari is "likely" to be deported on or before Dec 24.

He said Gonzales flew to Kuala Lumpur last night.

Misuari faces rebellion charges, punishable by 20 years in prison, for allegedly instigating the latest armed revolt.

Misuari's Moro National Liberation Front ended a 24-year rebellion to set up an Islamic state in the southern Philippines in 1996, when he signed a peace settlement that gave the Muslims a measure of self-rule in a number of southern provinces.