

PM: Decision on Misuari stays

SUN 30 DEC 2001

'It is not for the govt to decide on his family's appeal'

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said there is no shift in the Malaysian government's decision to send back renegade Muslim leader Nur Misuari to the Philippines despite appeals from his family.

Mahathir said it is not for the Malaysian government to decide on the appeal.

"If there is an appeal from family members, it is not for us to determine as our undertaking is that we will not give shelter to anybody involved in any of such activities," he told a press conference after opening PPP's 48th annual general assembly here today.

Mahathir also agreed with Umno Youth's call for the government to investigate the background of Nur Misuari's lawyer, Elly Velez Lao Pamatong.

"We also want to know what is his mandate. We want to know since he interferes, what is his position," he said.

Meanwhile, an AFP report from Manila quoted President Gloria Arroyo as saying that she expects Misuari to be repatriated from Malaysia around Jan 15, to spare the Malaysian government the trouble of holding onto him.

Arroyo said in a televised national address that Misuari would be sent back

"probably on Jan 15 or thereabouts. Then we will put him in a detention centre".

She said she wanted the renegade back early because "it is so embarrassing to Malaysia. It might bring our troubles there. The Malaysian citizens might ask Dr Mahathir Mohamad why are we taking care of the problems of other countries".

However she minimised the threat that Misuari's return might prompt his followers to stir unrest, saying that he had already been stripped of the leadership of his former Muslim rebel group, the Moro National Liberation Front.