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Arroyo-Malaysia

ARROYO WANTS M'SIA TO TAKE FIRST CRACK AT MISUARI

MANILA, Nov 25 (Bernama) -- Malaysia should take "a first crack" at Moro leader Nur Misuari before it hands him over to Manila for trial for rebellion, President Gloria Arroyo said today.

"I'll be very comfortable if Malaysia deals with him first because he has violated Malaysian laws. So let them handle him," she told reporters shortly after attending Roman Catholic Sunday Mass here.

Malaysian police nabbed Misuari and six followers at dawn on Saturday for entering the country illegally and they remain in police custody.

Misuari, sacked by Arroyo as Muslim Mindanao governor for instigating the bloody revolt in Southern Philippines, fled to Sabah from Jolo after the Philippine military launched a manhunt for him.

A court in Jolo where Misuari's heavily armed men assaulted military and police outposts also ordered his arrest without bail. Rebellion carries a 20-year jail term.

Misuari mounted the revolt to derail tomorrow's elections for Muslim Mindanao governor in his attempt to keep himself in power.

Arroyo said she had instructed the foreign affairs and justice departments to recognise Kuala Lumpur's prerogative to investigate Misuari.

She said that after Malaysia was through with Misuari, "we can effect his repatriation so that he can face the rebellion charges against him in Philippine courts."

"The law must take its course and that those responsible for the attacks in Sulu and elsewhere shall be meted out justice," she said.

Arroyo thanked the Malaysian Government of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for its swift action in arresting the rebel leader.

"I called Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad last night to thank him for the immediate response of his government to our request for assistance in the interdiction of Misuari and his cohorts," she said.

In giving way to Kuala Lumpur's prerogative over Misuari, Arroyo said "we will let Malaysia investigate him first for violation of their own laws and charge him according to their own laws."

"Because, as Prime Minister Mahathir said yesterday, he entered Malaysia illegally and he is a threat to their national security and they have an Internal Security Act," she added.

Arroyo noted that although there was no extradition treaty between the two Asean partners, both adhere to bilateral and multilateral arrangements covering terrorism and transnational crimes.

She said Manila had also informed the Organisation of Islamic Conference, which had helped negotiate peace with Muslim guerrillas in Mindanao, about Misuari's case.

-- BERNAMA

LBJ AT AAM