

11 DEC 2001

Mahathir-Misuari

M'SIA HOLDING NUR MISUARI FOR A MONTH ONLY, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 11 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia is holding in custody Filipino Muslim leader Nur Misuari, who was arrested Nov 24 for entering Malaysia illegally, for only a month.

"We have no reason to retain him here. We will sent him back to Manila anytime they (the Philippine government) want to take him back," he told reporters here today when asked about Misuari's actual deportation date.

Dr Mahathir earlier presented cash aid of RM100 each to 200 poor folk from the various communities from here and Selangor under an inaugural federal special allocation for Hari Raya relief for the needy.

Asked whether Malaysia has received indication from countries willing to accept Misuari, Dr Mahathir said there was no indication of such offer.

To a question whether Malaysia would release Misuari, the prime minister said: "The fact remains that Misuari has not committed any offence in Malaysia except for illegal entry. We are detaining him for only a month. After that we have to let him go. But we are not releasing him to go where he likes ...he does not even have (travel and other) papers."

"Indeed we want to deport him. If Manila wants him, then take him... Otherwise, we cannot keep him here. If others are willing to take him, we shall send him there," he said.

Asked why Manila was seemingly reluctant to accept Misuari back, Dr Mahathir said: "I do not know the reason for that. It is their (Manila's) problem."

Misuari was arrested together with six followers for entering Malaysia illegally through Jampiras Island off Sandakan in Sabah while fleeing the Philippines.

He is wanted by the Philippine government for declaring war against it after Manila barred him from contesting in the election to choose leaders of the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) of which he was the former governor.

-- BERNAMA

NZ DC RYN