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Misuari to stay until January

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Nur Misuari may remain in Malaysia until mid-January as requested by Manila during a meeting of representatives of the Organisation of Islamic Conference's Ministerial Committee of Eight, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said tonight.

He said the Philippines was at the moment unable to take custody of Misuari, the former Governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, in view of the domestic situation in the country and the need to beef up security in the event the former Governor lands on Philippine soil.

The long Christmas and New Year holidays have also made it difficult for the Philippines to organise the logistics to hold Misuari safely.

"We still hold on to the understanding that he must be deported as soon as possible ... the sooner, the better, because we do not want to be in limbo.

"Nur Misuari is neither a refugee nor an asylum seeker. We are holding him on behalf of the Philippine Government and the most important thing now is that we already have an agreement ... which is to deport him.

"The timing for his deportation is just an administrative matter," Syed Hamid told the New Straits Times when contacted upon his return from Manila.

He said President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was in constant consultation with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad over the matter.

Meanwhile, AFP reported that Nur Misuari has warned of a "very bloody civil war" in the Philippines if he is deported.

"Misuari will become the rallying point of all types of violent reactions coming from fanatic and non-fanatic elements of the Bangsamoro (Muslim Philippine) region," Elly Pamatong, a United States-based lawyer who claims to represent Misuari, said in a letter to Philippine ambassador Jose Brillantes.

"Misuari's incarceration will elevate his stature as a persecuted political leader like Nelson Mandela and it can drag the Philippines into the vortex of a very bloody civil war," he wrote.

Manila sources said the OIC representatives' discussion with Misuari's successor, Dr Farouk Hussein, yesterday and today, focused on the security situation in Mindanao.

"The Governor has given an undertaking that the situation is under control and the threat of new attacks is small.

"Since being elected the Governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao he has been able to bring together the various groups, including those previously aligned to Misuari," said the sources when contacted today.

However, it is learnt that the Philippines military had requested more time to prepare for Misuari's detention, indicating that it needed to also protect him from his enemies.

Misuari's 30-day detention period under the Malaysian Immigration Act expires on Dec 24, but the detention order can be extended on the order of the Home Ministry.

"This is allowed under the Act," a Home Ministry official said.