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Pining for Misuari

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Lonely and confused. That was how the wife of Nur Misuari, the former Governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, described herself as she hugged her nine-month-old daughter, Nurhata while her elder daughter Nur Rhada, seven, and her son Khalid, four, snuggled up to her.

Tarhata Ibrahim Misuari, the 27-year-old wife of the deposed leader, said she missed her husband and the children their father.

"I tell my children that their father has gone for a long meeting. Khalid, who is his father's pet, wakes up at night and asks for him," Tarhata said, adding that the boy has lost some weight.

Misuari and six followers were arrested on Pulau Jampiras off Sabah on Nov 24 for entering Malaysia illegally while fleeing southern Philippines after declaring war against Manila.

Kuala Lumpur and Manila are negotiating Misuari's deportation to the Philippines, which is expected to be soon.

Speaking at a hotel here, Tarhata said she hopes Malaysian authorities would allow her and her children to see Misuari soon.

"We hope that in the spirit of Hari Raya we are allowed to see him as soon as possible. The children want to hug him," she said, speaking through an interpreter, US-based lawyer Elly V.L. Pamatong, who claims to represent Misuari.

Tarhata appealed to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad not to send Misuari back to the Philippines as she feared for his safety.

"I believe Misuari's life will be in great danger if he is sent back there. I would like him to be sent to the US," she said, adding that if that was not possible, then her next choice was Europe.

In the event that Misuari was sent back to the Philippines, Tarhata, who hails from Sulu and has been married to Misuari for seven years, said she would have no choice but to follow him "for the sake of the children".

Dr Mahathir today said the Government would allow Misuari's family to visit him in detention.

"I read today in the papers that his family is here. I don't see why they cannot see him because he is not really a prisoner in that sense except that he is here because he has no travel papers and, as you know, illegal immigrants are detained by the Government and the period how long (he will be held here) is not fixed," he said.