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Mahathir-Misuari

PM: KL YET TO DECIDE WHEN TO DEPORT NUR MISUARI TO THE PHILIPPINES

PUTRAJAYA, Dec 17 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia has yet to decide when to deport the former governor of the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao, Nur Misuari, to the Philippines.

"We have yet to decide the date," the prime minister told reporters at his open house on the second day of Aidilfitri at Seri Perdana, here.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on a statement made earlier by Philippine ambassador to Malaysia Jose S.Brillantes at the same function that Misuari might be deported to the Philippines before Dec 24, 2001, "if we go by Malaysia's immigration laws".

Under the immigration laws, Misuari, who was detained along with six others on Pulau Jampiras, Sabah, on Nov 24 for entering Malaysia illegally from Jolo in the southern Philippines, can be held for up to 30 days and the period expires on Dec 24.

Yesterday, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would send Misuari to a third country if the Philippine government does not take him back.

Misuari fled to Malaysia after being accused of heading an armed rebellion against Manila and declaring war on the Philippine government.

Asked today if Manila had officially informed Kuala Lumpur on when the Philippine authorities planned to take Misuari back, Dr Mahathir said:

"We'll wait and discuss (with Manila)."

Meanwhile, Brillantes told reporters that within the next nine days, "there will be something moving" on the issue.

"The date (for Misuari's deportation) is better kept confidential for security reasons," he said.

Brillantes indicated that it would be up to the Philippine and Malaysian police to decide on the deportation date.

He said the police from the two countries were trying to finalise the arrangements for the deportation.

Brillantes said the Philippine government had stated "quite categorically that they are preparing for the eventual deportation or turnover" of Misuari.

"The bottom line is that the Philippines is preparing for his return. The Malaysian authorities are prepared to send him back," he said.

He said the Malaysian police had indicated that they were winding up the interrogation on Misuari.

He said the highest authorities from both countries had spoken on the issue and "there is no indication the event can be any different than what they have stated".

Last week, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo said Manila would send the Presidential Advisor on Special Concern, Norberto Gonzalez, to Malaysia to discuss the matter with the government.

On the charges against Misuari, Brillantes said it was up to the law enforcement and judicial body of the Philippines.

"Let this issue take its course," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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