

PM: Manila's move to improve ties welcomed

23 OCT 1992

ALOR STAR: Malaysia welcomes the Philippine Government's move to improve bilateral relations by setting up a special office to probe its claim on Sabah, Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

However, the Prime Minister said there was a problem as there seemed to be "no one authority (in the Philippines) that could really decide."

He said statements on the issue were being made by various Filipino authorities and these were not helpful in finding a solution.

On the position of Filipinos in Sabah, he said the Government's position on the issue had been "firm and clear."

"All of them are free to return home any time they want.

"Why should we continue to be accused of not treating them well?" he asked when speaking to

newsmen after opening the Kedah Umno convention.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on a wire report yesterday on the setting up of the office the Philippine Government.

The report stated that the primary task of the Sabah office was to study the Sabah issue with a view to exploring new approaches to improving bilateral relations.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia considered the 300,000 Filipinos in Sabah as illegal immigrants and as such there was no need to for a special consul to look after their affairs.

On the Subang airport fire, he said arson was not ruled out.

On the position of DCA director-general Datuk Zolkipli Abdul who had reportedly said he was prepared to quit, Dr Mahathir said it was up to the Government to decide.

He said the fire was a lesson that security at airports should not be taken lightly.

On the reshuffle of the Utusan Melayu (M) Bhd senior editorial members, Dr Mahathir said it was the newspaper's right to do so.

He reiterated he had spoken the truth with regard to the interview he granted to a private Indonesian TV station.

"I felt very slighted that Utusan had accused me of lying and it was suspicious of whether I was telling the truth.

"They could not take my word on such a simple matter," he said.

Utusan executive chairman Datuk Haji Khalid Abdullah had announced the revamp on Wednesday. Among those affected are Utusan group-chief editor Haji Zainuddin Maidin who has been appointed adviser to the Editorial Department.