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DR M extends his condolences to RMAF families

PETALING JAYA, Sun. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today extended his condolences to the families of 11 Royal Malaysian Air Force crew members who died in the Sipitang crash in Sabah last Tuesday.

Dr Mahathir, who was speaking to reporters at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang upon his return from Saudi Arabia where he received the King Faisal International Prize, said he was saddened by news of the crash.

Dr Mahathir said the cause of the crash of two Nuri helicopters must first be determined before any decision on the service of the aircraft could be made.

He said: "We have to know whether it is a mechanical or structural fault or error by the pilots. This is because of two helicopters crashing at about the same time...perhaps they collided due to thick mist.

"We have to ascertain this first. If collision indeed happened, it is not a mechanical fault which led to the crashes."

Asked whether the Royal Malaysian Air Force should continue using the helicopters, the Prime Minister said: "Yes, they are still relevant. In fact, on the day of the crash, I myself had used them for my journey to and fro from Taman Negara. I did not find anything wrong with the aircraft."

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether Singapore should make definite moves to mend its relations with Malaysia following disparaging remarks by Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew on Johor.

Dr Mahathir said he did not wish to say anything more on the matter or place conditions on the Singapore Government.

"We are not going to do anything extraordinary about it (mending relations)...we will let time heal...who makes matters worse or not is something for everybody to think."

The Malaysian Government had on Wednesday formally accepted Lee's unreserved apology and offer to retract his remarks but said "the restoration of the old level of relationship would take time."

It said it should be acknowledged that the episode had deeply hurt all Malaysians.

Dr Mahathir said: "The Cabinet has made a stand and we are sticking to it. We feel the matter is closed...but as the saying goes, the wound in the heart takes a long time to heal."

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