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DR M SADDENED BY DUGONG'S DEATH

KUALA LUMPUR, March 11 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said though he was saddened by the death of Dugong after the rare mammal was sent back to sea, there was no guarantee he would have survived in captivity.

"Although I feel sad that Dugong has died, we also could not guarantee that if we had kept him he would not have died," he said today.

The baby dugong (sea cow), nicknamed Si Tenang (The Calm One), turned up dead yesterday, some 48 hours after he was released back to sea by fisherman Atan Husin.

"I sympathise with them (Atan and family) but our policy is not to allow the rearing of such animals," he told reporters at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang, near here, on his return from a two-day visit to Sabah.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on the death of the 1.5m long, 30kg dugong, a species facing extinction and fully protected under the Wildlife Protection Act and Fisheries Act 1985.

Atan, 50, and his family found a wounded Si Tenang trapped in a prawn net off Kampung Pasir Putih in Johor's coastal waters on Feb 25, but released him into sea on Monday on the directive of the Fisheries Department.

-- BERNAMA

HS YBY