

Don't incite religious feelings, says Dr M

SUN 8.5.2000

Foreign media rapped for 'insensitive' reports on crisis

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has criticised the foreign media for "irresponsible and insensitive" reporting on the hostage crisis.

The Prime Minister advised them against playing with religious sentiments in their reporting as it would be too easy to generate trouble.

"It (using religious sentiments) will create problems for everybody. It will stiffen the back of the group responsible and when people are pushed to a corner, the tendency is that they will turn around and fight," he said after attending the Kuala Lumpur Thomas/ Uber Cup Run 2000 at Dataran Merdeka.

Mahathir responded when asked whether attempts by the foreign media to highlight religious sentiments would dampen efforts to rescue the 21 hostages seized from Sipadan on April 23.

Yesterday, local television stations aired footages by the foreign media which showed interviews with a mayor, a priest and family members of a Philippine soldier who died in a clash with the group responsible for the kidnapping.

During the interviews, they were quoted as saying that should anything happen to the victims, the Muslims in Mindanao should be held responsible and the armed group should be eradicated.

Nine Malaysians and 12 foreigners were kidnapped by six gunmen in Sipadan Island off Sabah and are now held in a hideout of the Abu Sayyaf separatist group in Jolo Island in the southern Philippines.

The foreigners comprised three Germans, two South Africans, two Finns, two French, two Filipinos and a Lebanese.

Mahathir said it was to be expected of the foreign media to raise such sentiments.

He said they had not been responsible and had not thought about the safety of the victims when carrying out their duties.