

Malaysia is still safe, Mahathir assures tourists

PUTRAJAYA, Tues: Malaysia will try to free those taken hostage at Sipadan island but will not accuse anyone until investigations are completed, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The authorities are still trying to get a **clear** picture of the motive of the **gunmen** who seized 21 **people** on the resort island off Sabah on Sunday night.

"It is possible that they only wanted to capture foreigners ... we don't know ... **such a thing has never** happened there before.

"We don't want to accuse anyone. We are investigating," Mahathir told a press conference at his office here.

Although the incident will affect **Sabah** tourism, the Prime Minister said, the rest of the **country** should not be affected.

"Malaysia is quite safe for tourists. Other countries may not be safe. But this (kidnapping) was not done by our people," he said.

On the claim that the gunmen may belong to the Abu Sayyaf group, Mahathir said: "That's their report. I have no

comment."

Asked about the inadequacy of security **patrols** in Malaysian waters, Mahathir said the country is not facing any serious danger.

"#at happened was that during the economic crisis, we directed a reduction in patrols ... now, we have beefed it up," he said.

Asked about a BBC report that Malaysia's security is inadequate, he said that while it may be true, Malaysia does not often face threatening situations such as the kidnapping.