

# PM: It's better for the rebels to release the others also

**PETALING JAYA**, Mon: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has again called for the release of **20** more hostages held by rebels in the southern Philippine island of **Jolo**.

He said now that the Abu Sayyaf rebels have gained the world's attention, it is better for them to release the **remaining** hostaas detained on various parts of the island.

"I think it will serve their **purpose** (to release them), otherwise **the world** will think of them as a group of terrorists.

"I think they have achieved what they had aimed for . . . attracting international attention, but holding on to the hostages will do them no good," he told a press conference on his return from Egypt and **Italy**.

On whether Malaysia is considering paying the ransom to secure the release

of eight more Malaysians, Mahathir said: "As a government, we don't pay ransom."

The Abu Sawaf rebels, who snatched 21 people from the resort island of **Sipadan** on **April 23**, released one of the nine Malaysians on 'Friday

Yesterday, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed **Hamid Albar** said that Sabah **Wildlife** Department ranger Zulkarnain **Hashim**, held **captive** for **60** days, was released through-a "spiritual approach" and not by paying the ransom demanded by the rebels.

Mahathir also said that representatives from the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) member countries attending the 27th Islamic Conference of Foreign-Ministers (ICFM) hosted in Kuala Lumpur will be updated on related developments.

On whether the OIC will form a pressure group to help secure the release the remaining 20 hostages, he said it is not very **likely**.

**On the four-day** ICFM meeting, which starts tomorrow, Mahathir said he hopes that Islamic countries will respect each other and not compete as to who is more Islamic.

"Although there are some who **practise (Islam) and** some who don't **practise fully**, we're all still brothers.

"We (Malaysia) are not siding with any country We only uphold the brotherhood of Islamic countries," he said.

About 1,000 delegates from 56 OIC member countries will attend the ICFM organised by the Malaysian Institute of Islamic Understanding and the Centre for Intellectual Promotion and Technology Advancement.