

27 JUL 2000

Mahathir-Hostages

DR MAHATHIR MEETS FREED SIPADAN HOSTAGES

KOTA KINABALU, July 27 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had a meeting with all the six freed Sipadan hostages, here, tonight.

The 30-minute meeting was held in a special room at Hotel Magellan Sutera before the prime minister and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, attended a dinner with the people.

The six are wildlife rangers Zulkarnain Hashim and Francis Masangkim, 34, another department staff, Baln Krishnan Nair, 34, dive master Vincent Kwong, 40, assistant cook Lee Hock Leong, 20, and policeman Abdul Jawah Salawat.

Present were Chief Minister Datuk Seri Panglima Osu Sukam and his wife, Datin Seri Panglima Noredah Majimpi, and families of the six as well of that of the remaining three Malaysians who are still being held captive in Jolo in the southern Philippines.

The nine were among 21 people taken hostage by an armed group in Sipadan Island on April 23 and held in Jolo.

Zulkarnain was released on June 23, Abdul Jawah on July 14 and Masangkim, Nair, Kwong and Lee on July 20.

A German woman, Renate Wallert, has also been released by the abductors.

The other three Malaysians still held captive are Fong Yin Ken, 28, wildlife ranger Basilius Jim, 28, and cook Kua Yu Loong, 21.

Besides Wallert, the other foreign hostages comprise two Germans, two South Africans, two French, two Finns, two Filipinos and a Lebanese.

In his conversation with the hostages Dr Mahathir asked about their condition in captivity.

Speaking to reporters later, he asked the families of the three Malaysians who were still held captive to be patient,

He said those who had been freed had related that they were not tortured although the food was not that good.

"I hope that those still in captivity are treated just like those who have been released. I hope that their families are not too worried because it seems that this group is not violent like the one we saw in Sauk, Perak, who tortured and killed.

"We hope that the others will be released immediately," Dr Mahathir said.

On July 2, 15 Al-Ma'unah members robbed two army camps in Gerik of a large cache of weapons and ammunition and later holed up in Bukit Jenalek, Sauk, with 13 other members, killing two hostages before surrendering themselves to the security forces.

Asked whether he had received the latest news from Jolo, the prime minister said efforts were still being made by the authorities there to secure the release of the hostages.

-- BERNAMA

JS AHH JK