

26/04/2000

Malaysia still a safe haven for tourists: PM

Kamarul Yunus

MALAYSIA is still a safe haven for tourists despite the kidnapping incident on Sipadan island off Sabah on Sunday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

Describing the incident as an isolated case, Dr Mahathir said the Sipadan area is a peaceful tourist resort and there had been no such incidents before.

He said the incident will affect tourism in Sabah, but not the rest of the country.

He was asked at a press conference in Putrajaya yesterday about the latest development on the incident in which armed pirates, believed to be Filipinos, took 20 people, including foreigners.

Dr Mahathir said the raid was not carried out by Malaysians, adding that such incidents are not common in the country.

He also said although there could be lax of security at some tourist spots in the area, there was no serious danger.

Following the incident, Dr Mahathir said there would be more patrols by the security forces in the area.

He said the authorities are still investigating the Sipadan case and the motive behind it.

"We do not want to accuse anyone; we are investigating," he said when asked whether international politics could be a reason.

In the incident, six pirates, armed with AK-47 assault rifles and a bazooka, took nine Malaysians and 11 foreigners hostage and fled with them in two boats towards Philippines waters.

When asked about the US authorities' use of force in seizing six-year-old Cuban castaway Elian Gonzalez, Dr Mahathir said:

"We are gentle people ... we do not point guns at anybody and resort to violence"

"I am not against the American people, but I don't like some of their press and American leaders. They are always fabricating lies about Malaysia."

(END)