

04 JUNE 2000

Mahathir-Sipadan

M'SIA TO CONSIDER WHATEVER MOVE TO SECURE RELEASE OF SIPADAN CAPTIVES

PULAU PINANG, June 4 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Malaysia will have to consider whatever move to secure the release of the 21 Sipadan captives held in the southern Philippine island of Jolo.

Malaysia also had to ensure the safety of the 21 captives, he said when asked to comment on the reported demand by the kidnapers for ransom of US\$1 million (RM\$3.8 million) for the release of each of the 21 captives.

The nine Malaysians, a German family of three, a French couple, a Finnish couple, two South Africans, two Filipinos and a Lebanese were kidnapped by gunmen from a dive resort in Sipadan off Sabah on April 23.

"Confronted with a situation where the terrorists could possibly do something to their victims, we will have to consider whatever move to save them," he told a news conference after a tour of several places here. Last night, he closed the Eighth Malaysia Games (Sukma).

According to a report from Zamboanga in south Philippines on Friday, the kidnapers holding the 21 captives have demanded ransom of US\$1 million for the release of each captive.

Dr Mahathir also said that the government would investigate the existence of hired killers in the country.

Asked to comment on the possibility that Free Aceh Movement (GAM) activist Teuku Don Zulfahri could have been killed by hired killers, he expressed concern over the availability of such services in the country.

Teuku Don was shot dead by a gunman or gunmen at Pandan Perdana on Thursday.

The prime minister said that in politics, such killings should not occur.

"We do not want a situation where people are paid to kill political opponents. This is not our culture," he said.

In KUALA LUMPUR, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that the police would conduct an investigation into the killing of Teuku Don.

"This is a serious case," said Abdullah, who is Home Minister.

"When such an incident occurs, the police will be thorough. It does not matter who the victims are," he told reporters after delivering his keynote address at the 14th Asia-Pacific roundtable.

Asked to comment on the demand for ransom by the kidnapers holding the 21 Sipadan captives in Jolo, Abdullah said that priority would be to secure their release as soon as possible.

He said that Malaysia was also thinking whether there was a need to seek other ways to resolve the kidnap crisis.

Malaysia would talk with the Philippine authorities to seek a solution, he added.

-- BERNAMA

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