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No unilateral action, says PM

SERDANG, Tues. - Malaysia did not engage in any unilateral action to free the 21 hostages held by an armed group on the southern Philippine island of Jolo.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today denied that Malaysia had attempted to do things unilaterally by sending Malaysian Ambassador to the Philippines Mohamed Arshad M. Hussain to negotiate with the kidnappers.

Whatever action was taken by Malaysia, he said, was done with the consent of the Philippine Government.

"We are concerned because these are hostages taken from Malaysian territory and they also include Malaysians.

"So, we have the right to be concerned," he told reporters after opening the Third Asia-Africa Forum here.

The victims, nine Malaysians and 12 foreign nationals, were kidnapped by the armed group from Sipadan island in Sabah on April 23.

Dr Mahathir said this when asked to comment on news reports that Philippine Government chief negotiator Robert Aventajado had expressed unhappiness at Mohamed Arshad's action.

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