

23/05/2000

`Attempted coup in Fiji expected'

PRIME MINISTER Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad expressed his regret over the attempted coup in the south Pacific island of Fiji but believed that the incident was bound to happen.

"We are very sorry that these things happen, although we must say that we expected something like this to happen," he told newsmen after launching MEC Dagang's dealers convention and new corporate logo in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said such events will continue to take place unless there is a strong programme for the indigenous Fijians in terms of sharing the economic wealth of the country

"It is much more difficult in Fiji because the disparity is very great. Unless there is a very strong programme for the bumiputeras (indigenous people) of Fiji, so that they will feel that they are sharing the wealth of the country, this, I think, will happen over and over again," he said.

He was asked to comment on the incident where Fijian Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and several Government officials were detained by a local businessman George Speight and a group of armed men last Friday.

Saying that they represent the Fijian indigenous people, the group had detained the Fijian Prime Minister and 14 others in the Parliament building in Suva.

On whether Malaysian investments in Fiji were affected by the attempted coup, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia has some investments in that country but "not very much, may be in the tourism industry".

"But at times, we have to take the risks. You cannot expect the Government to protect you all the time," he said.