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Mahathir-Hostages

RELEASING ALL THE HOSTAGES WILL SERVE THE CAUSE OF THE MILF, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, June 26 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that while he is happy over the release of one of the Malaysian hostages held by the armed group in the southern Philippine island of Jolo, he sincerely hoped that they will release all the other Malaysian and foreign hostages.

The prime minister said it would serve the cause of the armed rebels to release them because otherwise the world would think of them as a group of terrorists which had no principles.

"They have achieved, I think, what they want to achieve, that is to draw attention to their struggle," he told a news conference at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang, near here, on his return from Egypt and Italy.

He said to continue to detain the hostages would be going against the armed rebels' own interest.

He was asked to comment on the release of Zulkarnain Hashim, 29, a Wildlife Department ranger from Sabah, who was taken captive at gunpoint together with eight other Malaysians and 12 foreigners, from Sipadan on April 23.

To a question, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia needs to inform the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), which is scheduled to hold its foreign ministers meeting here this week, of the hostage-taking incident.

To another question on what he thought the OIC would do to resolve the matter, he said he would not know as yet.

Asked on whether Malaysia would ask the OIC to appease and pressure the armed group to release the hostages, the prime minister said: "We don't know yet. We have no particular plan except to inform the OIC".

On the group's alleged renewed demand for ransom, Dr Mahathir said he did not know about that.

"But as a government, we don't pay ransom," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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