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Try to understand us, PM tells Europeans

EUROPEANS should be more open and sensitive towards Asians if they want to maintain close ties, including business ventures between the two communities, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"Don't print nasty things about us. It hurts us and you. Europeans should understand us much better because you have been around here longer than others," he said at a dialogue held in conjunction with the two-day Europe-Asia Business Summit 2000 in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The Prime Minister was asked on the current European-Asian relations, and ways to improve ties, especially in business dealings.

Dr Mahathir said Asians, particularly Malaysians, were hurt by insensitive Europeans who have created wrong perceptions among Europeans about Asians.

"I hope they (Europeans) can rectify these negative impressions. They should understand that every country has problems and Malaysia is no exception," he said.

For example, Dr Mahathir said, foreign media have been giving a wrong impression in their reports during the hostage drama in Sipadan island last month.

Following the incident, he said they (foreign media) gave the impression that Malaysia is unsafe.

"Why can't the European broadcast stations tell the whole truth that this (kidnapping) is not a common incident," he said.

In the incident on April 23, 21 people, including nine Malaysians, were held hostage by a Philippines rebel group. They are still being held by the group in Jolo, in southern Philippines.

Dr Mahathir said the abduction was not perpetuated by Malaysia and it was something unexpected, just as the bombings in London by the Irish Republican Army.

He said the London bombings did not mean one should tell the whole world that the British capital is unsafe and give a "don't-visit-London" advice.

He said that the Government has never directed Malaysians not to visit London because of the bombing. "We never do that kind of thing," he said.

However, he said, if there was a small riot in Kuala Lumpur, the foreign media gave the impression that Malaysia was in a state of anarchy and unsafe.

"But you know very well that you can go to the kampungs feeling safe and to the many Chinatowns and the Tongs will not come out to hurt you ... I know a lot of Tongs and they are very nice people," he said.

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