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`We did not pay ransom to kidnappers'

PUTRAJAYA, Sat - Malaysia did not pay any ransom to secure yesterday's release of four more Malaysian captives held in the southern Philippines, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

On the other hand, he said that the country was always keen to help develop the region.

The Prime Minister said the Government, however, had no power to stop other countries from paying ransom to secure the release of their nationals.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on the release of the four hostages held captive for 90 days in Jolo.

He was speaking to reporters after opening Puspanita's 18th annual general meeting at the Sekolah Menengah Putrajaya 1.

Dr Mahathir was asked about foreign media reports that Malaysia had paid ransom to secure the release of the hostages.

On reports that Malaysia had given a commitment to develop the southern Philippines in return for the hostages' release, Dr Mahathir said: "I do not know if there was a commitment or not. But we are always keen to help develop southern Philippines."

He said Malaysia was already doing so by creating job opportunities through various investments such as in oil palm plantations.

On whether it was possible that the private sector could be involved in paying the ransom, Dr Mahathir said he had no knowledge of the matter, but it was possible.

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