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Manila should apologise, says Mahathir

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Manila should apologise for jumping to the conclusion that the girl who said she was raped at a detention centre in Sabah was a Philippine national.

The prime minister said the Philippine government should be a "little bit more sensitive and a little bit more cautious" in making statements that could sour relations.

"They could have informed us instead of making a big noise about it, getting into the papers and all that. If there is a case, report to us (and) we will investigate," he told a news conference after opening the International Nuclear Conference 2002.

On how the girl had been sent to the Philippines, Mahathir said she was found among illegal immigrants and did not have an address.

"Even if there is a rape case, let's find out first whether a rape was committed before jumping to conclusions."

Asked whether he is writing to the Philippines over the issue, he said: "No, I don't write letters."

The rape allegation gained Mahathir's attention after President Gloria Arroyo wrote to him asking the Malaysian government to investigate the allegation as the underage girl was said to be a Philippine national.

In Shah Alam, Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil urged the authorities to speed up their investigations.

"It does not matter if she is Malaysian or Filipino, justice must be done," she said.

She suggested that the girl who is still in the Philippines be given shelter at one of the homes run by the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development.

Meanwhile, the charge d'affaires of the Philippines embassy, Luis Cruz said he had informed Manila on the demand for an apology.