

# ***Manila should apologise, says Mahathir***

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KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he had no plans to write to Philippine President Gloria Arroyo demanding an apology for assuming that a 13-year-old girl who was allegedly raped at the temporary detention depot in Sabah was a Philippine national.

However, he said an apology "was in order" because the Philippine Government had jumped to such a conclusion.

"I think they should (apologise) because they jumped to

the conclusion that we rape people, their people.

"They have to be a little more sensitive and a little more cautious in making statements that can lead to the souring of relations between countries," he said after opening the International Nuclear Conference 2002 at the Putra World Trade Centre yesterday.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar had said on Monday that the Philippine Government should say sorry to Malaysia for being "carried away by wild allegations made by certain quarters through the media" over the issue.

Dr Mahathir said that the

Philippine Government should have relayed its concerns through the proper channels.

"They could have informed us about this girl instead of making a big noise about it, getting to the papers and all that. If there is a case, report it to us and we will look into it," he added.

In Shah Alam, Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil said the 13-year-old who was allegedly raped, deserved justice, regardless of her nationality.

"Whether she is Malaysian or a Philippine citizen does not

matter. Rape is rape," Shahrizat told reporters yesterday.

She urged the police to continue with their investigations into the allegation of rape, allegedly committed by a member of the enforcement force.

"If there is sufficient evidence to charge the aggressor in court, the police should do it," she said.

Shahrizat said her concern was for the alleged rape victim as firm steps must be taken to make Malaysia a safe country.

"We want the world to know

it is safe here, where acts of aggression, especially brutality against women, will not be tolerated nor condoned," she said after attending the Selangor state-level opening ceremony for the Nur Sejahtera 2002 campaign to promote family harmony and health. In Manila, the Philippine Government ruled out an apology.

"We don't see the need for that. The Philippines took up the cudgels for a rape victim, a minor. Now, are we to be faulted for that?" Foreign Affairs spokesman Victoriano Lecaros said.