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Mahathir-Filipina

PM INSTRUCTS SWIFT AND THOROUGH INVESTIGATION INTO RAPE ALLEGATION

CYBERJAYA, Sept 5 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has directed that a swift and thorough investigation be conducted by the authorities into an allegation by a 13-year-old Filipina that she was a victim of sexual molestation in one of the detention centres in Kota Kinabalu.

"I would like to assure the government and the people of the Philippines that appropriate action will be taken against those responsible in accordance with Malaysian law," Dr Mahathir said in a statement in connection with the reported molestation case involving the Filipina, Jawina Song.

"The Malaysian government and I personally view with serious concern the allegation made by a Filipino minor, Miss Jawina Song, that she was a victim of sexual molestation," he said in the statement issued on the sideline of the sixth meeting of the International Advisory Panel for the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC-IAP) here today.

When asked by reporters at the end of today's meeting on a letter sent by Philippine President Gloria Arroyo Macapagal expressing concern over the case, Dr Mahathir said that he would be replying to the Philippine President to say that the Malaysian authorities would seriously investigate the matter.

"And if we find that it's true, we will get the culprit and he will be suitably dealt with," he said.

Reuters reported today that Arroyo wrote a letter to Dr Mahathir Wednesday over the reported rape of the girl by a Malaysian policeman assigned to a Sabah detention camp.

On whether there was any truth to the allegation, the Prime Minister said: "We'll have to find out. We just cannot say offhand whether it's true or not true."

Queried on his initial reaction upon receiving Arroyo's letter, Dr Mahathir said: "I am very annoyed that this thing should happen at all, I mean that there should be this allegation."

However, Dr Mahathir gave the assurance that if it was true, it was the Malaysian government's duty to take action against those involved.

On the reportedly harsh tone of the letter, he said it was perhaps strongly worded because "they feel very angry about it."

He said that Malaysians should be aware that they could not hide from the law if they had committed any crime.

"Our people should learn that they cannot get away with this kind of thing. This is damaging for the nation, for our image," he said.

Queried on the state of Malaysia-Philippines relations in light of the episode, Dr Mahathir said: "We'll see what this is all about."

-- BERNAMA

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