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Mahathir-Philippines

PHILIPPINES SHOULD APOLOGISE, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 15 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Manila should apologise for jumping to conclusion that the girl, who alleged being raped at the temporary detention depot 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 lead to the souring of relations between the two countries.

"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 media conference after opening the International Nuclear Conference 2002 here.

He was asked to comment on a statement made by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar on the issue. A press report had quoted police as confirming that the girl, whom the Philippines earlier claimed as its national, was in fact a Malaysian.

Asked how the girl had ended up being sent to the Philippines, Dr Mahathir said she was found among the illegal immigrants as she was wandering around without any address.

"But even if there is a rape case, let's find out first whether the rape is committed and all that before jumping in conclusion.

"This girl, I understand, is one of those street girls and you don't know what she has been up to," he said.

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

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

-- BERNAMA

AFY MFJ JK