

# PM warns those who instigate govt staff

By GERRIE TENG  
and NICK LEONG

PENANG: The Government will act against newspapers that buy information or instigate senior civil servants to leak information, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir ~~Mohamad~~ said.

He said this should not be viewed as a move to shut up the press.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on the controversy involving the purchase of 22 Volvos and the visit to Casablanca and Barcelona by Kuala Lumpur City Hall officials.

He said it was sad that some civil servants leaked information and this was against regulations.

The Government would investigate all these activities and if found to be true, appropriate action would be taken, he said after speaking at the 20th anniversary celebrations of Robert Bosch yesterday (see Page 3).

On the question on accountability of public funds brought up by the National Union of Journalists, Dr Mahathir said the Government announced its budget yearly and public expenditure was no secret.

He said the disclosure about the purchase of the Volvos was done without the permission of the Government and hence was a malpractice by government officers.

In Johor Baru, Law Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar said journalists who reported the truth need not fear the Official Secrets Act.

He said they should

verify the truth of any statement because they were responsible and accountable for their articles.

Syed Hamid was commenting on reports which quoted him as saying that "the City Hall affair is an internal affair" and that "any government action or procedure is secret unless they have been declassified."

The NUJ said the press should be allowed to play its role without intimidation and threats.

Syed Hamid said the Government had always believed in openness because it was the only way to bring out the truth and the Government also looked upon the media to disseminate accurate information, particularly its policies, to the people.

He said he had been misquoted on the City Hall affair and on the subject of classified government documents.

"Not only do the articles carry a wrong perception (of what I said) but also misinterpretation," he said.

"It was based on hearsay and by words which I did not say," he told newsmen at the opening of the *silat cekak* seminar at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia in Skudai.

He said Malaysians were generally in tune with happenings around them.

Syed Hamid said the Government had never intended to stifle the press but at the same time "none is above the law."

He said relations between the Government and the press were good.