

Dr M: We will probe Aussie bribery claim

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Government will investigate reports of Australian spies bribing Malaysian Opposition politicians, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

The Prime Minister said the Government wanted to know if there is any truth in the claims and who were those responsible.

Dr Mahathir described

the incident as something new. "If it had not been reported in the Australian press or if it had not been raised by former intelligence officers in Australia, we wouldn't have known," he added.

"I suppose if they have raised it they ought to know. Of course, we feel unhappy if the Australians have tried to influence domestic politics by supporting the Opposition financially."

Asked if action would

be taken against Opposition leaders found to be accepting such money, Dr Mahathir said if they were found to be doing something against the interest of the nation, the Government would act.

"But we have to be very careful about this. We don't want to be seen as persecuting the Opposition."

"It is more popular to prosecute the Government than the Opposition," he told reporters af-

ter opening the 9th biennial scientific meeting of the Asian-Pacific Association for the Study of the Liver here.

The Sydney-based *Sunday Telegraph* reported that tens of thousands of dollars had been paid to senior opposition politicians in Malaysia and Singapore without the knowledge of the Canberra Government.

It said the cash payments from the Australian Secret Intelligence

Service (Asis) began when the MPs were junior politicians and increased as the recipients grew in stature.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the allegation, if true, was very serious.

"It is up to the Opposition to refute the allegations but I believe an investigation should be carried out," he said.

"We will take the appropriate steps to ascertain the truth," he said.