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MALAYSIA WILL NOT APPEAL TO CANBERRA, SAYS MAHATHIR

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KUALA LUMPUR, May 17 (Bernama) -- Kuala Lumpur will not appeal to Canberra to cooperate with Malaysian authorities in investigations relating to allegations that local politicians were bribed by the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (Asis), Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said that although Malaysia was not satisfied with the Australian government's decision not to allow the Malaysian police to interview the editors and journalists of the Sunday Telegraph and the Canberra Times in connection with the report, the government would not lodge any appeals.

"I can do nothing much because we cannot force another country to divulge what it does not wish to," he told reporters after launching the National Telecommunications Policy and witnessing the signing of a contract for the manufacture of two satellites here.

The contract was signed between Binariang Sdn Bhd, a Malaysian consortium which will handle the Malaysian East Asian Satellite (Measat) to be launched by the end of next year and Hughes Communications International Incorporated of the United States.

Dr Mahathir, who is Home Minister, was asked to comment on the statement by Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Noor on Friday that the Australian government had disallowed three Malaysian police officers to interview the editor and journalists of the two newspapers regarding the report. -- more

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Late last year, the newspapers reported that Asis had paid thousands of Australian dollar in bribes to Malaysian and Singaporean politicians to obtain secret information without the knowledge and approval of the Canberra government.

This exposure caused uneasiness among Malaysian politicians who wanted Asis to name the politicians concerned to clear the names of politicians who were not involved.

"I feel that they (the Australian government) should indeed cooperate because over here we have a problem of certain people facing allegations," he said.

He said that at present government backbenchers were already alleged to have also received payments and not only members of the opposition as stated in their earlier reports.

As such, Dr Mahathir said, the Canberra government should cooperate to determine who were actually involved in accepting the bribes from Asis. --

However, he said, the government did not wish to pressure Australia to allow the Malaysian police to conduct investigations in connection with the matter as the government respected its rights.

"We are not appealing but we do hope (that the Australian government will take into account the problem of Malaysian politicians who could not defend themselves against the allegations of corruption," he said.

Without the cooperation, Dr Mahathir said, the government had to close the case although it was not satisfied as there was no way of knowing who were actually involved. -- Bernama

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