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Bank promises action (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - As the call for action against banks alleged to have leaked information on financial transactions grew louder, one financial institution promised action against wrongdoers.

Bumiputra-Commerce Bank, one of the banks whose employees are said to be involved, in a statement said that action would be taken against wrongdoers irrespective of their position.

"BCB, as a large and responsible bank, is firmly committed to the strict adherence of customer secrecy obligations and takes a serious view of the alleged breach of customer secrecy reported in the newspapers today.

"Our employees must strictly abide by the code of conduct and ethics and guidelines laid down by Bank Negara that include matters on conflict of interest, misuse of position, integrity of records and transactions, confidentiality and fair and equitable treatment.

"We view such breaches as serious and punishable offences," it said.

The issue first came to light when Chief Minister Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam on Tuesday said the State Government would withdraw fixed deposits worth RM45 million from two commercial banks whose staff were known to be openly supporting the Opposition.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said it was up to banks to take action against employees guilty of such wrongdoing.

The Prime Minister said pro-Opposition staff had leaked information regarding individual and government financial transactions over the Internet and through the circulation of copies and print-outs.

These leaks had been detected in Malacca and the Federal capital.

The National Malay Chamber of Commerce Malaysia also joined in the calls for a serious investigation into the allegations. Its president, Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli, said the affected banks should institute the heaviest penalty against staff involved.

"Trust is one of the main principles in the banking industry... if this is violated, the banking system will collapse," he said.

Tajudin said what was more disappointing was the fact that one of the banks whose employees were involved in leaking information operated on Islamic banking tenets.

"Where is the integrity of these officers who have violated the trust placed upon them," he added.

Attempts to get comments from officials of Bank Islam Malaysia Berhad, the other bank whose employees were alleged to have committed similar offences, proved futile as they were closed today.

Home Ministry Parliamentary secretary, Datuk Seri Abu Zahar Isnin, who was Malacca Chief Minister, said the banks must verify these allegations and carry full-scale investigations immediately.

DAP chairman Lim Kit Siang also called for a full and independent investigation into the issue.

"There should be cooler heads and greater rationality in dealing with the matter," he said.

Last night, Mohd Ali said the State Government has also terminated the contracts of international surveyor, CH William, Talhar & Wong, 20 local contractors and 21 pro-Opposition panel doctors. Mohd Ali said the State Government would also act against panel lawyers aligned with the Opposition.

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