

17/03/2000

Bank staff leaking info (HL)

Zubaidah Abu Bakar; Sharanjit Singh

JITRA, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today revealed that bank employees who sympathised with Opposition parties were leaking individual and Government financial transactions.

He said such transactions, which were supposed to be secret, had been leaked over the Internet and through circulation (of copies or print-outs). Such cases, he added, had been detected in some places, including Malacca and Kuala Lumpur.

"We know a lot of people whose dealings with certain banks have been revealed to the public by these people (bank employees).

"I know at least of one place where certain documents sent to the bank were circulated ... (in) those days (there was) no Internet, to show as if the Government is doing something bad," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was difficult to act against the banks but "the only thing the Government could do was not to have dealings with such banks (where there were many Opposition sympathisers).

Leaking information about financial transactions is an offence under the Banking and Financial Institutions Act 1989 (BAFIA).

Under it, no employee, including the chief executive during his employment or thereafter, shall divulge or publish any information or document relating to the affairs or accounts of customers.

Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam was reported to have said last Tuesday that the State Government planned to withdraw RM30 million in fixed deposits from two commercial banks.

He said this was because the staff of the banks openly supported the Opposition.

Last week, Mohd Ali asked State Government departments and agencies to terminate the services of panel clinics whose doctors were sympathisers of Opposition parties.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters at his Hari Raya Aidil Adha open house at Dewan Jitra here.

Also present were his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain.

Dr Mahathir was asked by reporters if there was a trend where Pas seemed to be getting rid of Barisan Nasional people in Terengganu (where the party has formed the State Government after winning the general election) and BN retaliating, as in the case in Malacca.

Dr Mahathir said the BN did not remove people.

"I have a lot of people who have openly confessed they are Pas supporters and they are in the Government ... at the rank of secretary-general, we have not removed (them).

"But in Malacca, the Government keeps money in the bank and the employees display they are supporters of Pas ... we have known in the past (copies of) cheques belonging to people have been given to the party (Pas) and they post on the Internet.

"So how do you trust a bank whose workers are against you and they have been known to reveal your secrets ... you keep money in the bank, they can take the cheque and copy it and put it on the Internet, so the Government cannot trust a bank which is like that."

Asked how such incidents would affect the credibility of the country's financial sector, the Prime Minister said:

"Well, if they do these things it will affect the credibility of some

banks.

"In the Government, for example, we know some (people) are strong supporters of the Opposition but we have appealed to them to be professional ... when you do work you must do it properly and not be influenced by party interests," he added.

Asked if legal action would be taken against those who revealed such secrets, Dr Mahathir said:

"If they are found to leak Government secrets, which is against the law, we will be forced to take legal action."

In Malacca, Mohd Ali said the Opposition was quick to blame and criticise the State Government on matters which were not parallel with their policies.

He said the DAP and Keadilan did not speak out when the Terengganu State Government sacked village headmen who supported the BN.

He also said the State Government has resolved to withdraw RM10 million in fixed deposit belonging to a Government agency from a local bank upon the maturity date.

He said another RM40 million in fixed deposit would be withdrawn from banks.

He said the banks had failed to take disciplinary action against employees who openly showed support for the Opposition.

The State Government and its agencies have funds totalling some RM200 million in several local banks.

Mohd Ali also said the State Government had blacklisted several contractors, legal firms and surveyors who had explicitly supported the Opposition. He said their contracts would be terminated.

Mohd Ali said the State Government need not send notices informing them of it.

(END)