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Budget-Mahathir (Smear)

LEGAL ACTION CONTEMPLATED AGAINST SMEAR CAMPAIGNERS, SAYS DR M

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 27 (Bernama) -- The government is considering taking legal action against Malaysians involved in a smear campaign to tarnish the country's image abroad including groups hiring foreign firms for the purpose, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the government was studying the laws to see whether their actions despite being done in foreign countries violated the country's laws as their target was Malaysia and the purpose was to ruin the country.

"We're looking into the matter whether it is reasonable or not because if we try to destroy our country, we become a traitor," he told a media conference after tabling of the 2001 Budget by Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin at the Dewan Rakyat today.

Dr Mahathir said the government viewed their actions as breaking the country's laws although such activities were done overseas.

"Their target is Malaysia and their intention is to destroy the country and make the people suffer," he said when asked to comment on press reports that supporters of former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had engaged a lobby firm to smear Malaysia's image abroad.

Dr Mahathir said it was clear that their intention was to destroy the country and to make the people suffer like the situation in Iraq, the people are suffering with no food and medicine.

"For instance, in Iraq... the victim is not the leader but the people," he said, adding that the groups were prepared to destroy the country and make the people suffer just because their leader had been found guilty and jailed.

Asked on the impact of the smear campaign, Dr Mahathir said the government could not guarantee that foreign investors would come to Malaysia because even if they wished to invest in Malaysia, they could not do so if their governments influenced by the campaign would impose sanctions on Malaysia.

He said if Malaysia's revenue was affected as a result of the campaign, the government might not be able to provide the people with what they have been enjoying all this while.

He said the government would carry out information sessions abroad but could not guarantee the results.

Asked on the explanation by Parti Keadilan Nasional that they had actually appointed a media consultant overseas, Dr Mahathir said as far as he knew, they do not only work with the mass media alone.

He said the foreign media was 100 per cent supporting them and wanted Anwar to be the prime minister of Malaysia.

" If the foreign media holds an election, definitely I'll lose," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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