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Dr M: Act against those who leaked details of Budget if there's evidence

PUTRAJAYA, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight that the relevant authorities must take action against civil servants who leaked Government secrets if such allegations are supported with hard evidence.

The Prime Minister said action must also be taken against outsiders who collaborated or induced Government servants into committing such crimes as their actions were detrimental to the Government.

"Firstly, I do not know if it (the claim by Terengganu Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Hadi Awang) is true or not, but if he had instigated Government officials, it is an offence. Similarly, if any Government official had leaked Government secrets ... it is also an offence.

"I think the relevant authorities would take action because if this is the case, then it would be difficult to run a Government, even if they (the opposition) form the Government ... they would face the same problem, so don't do things which you would not want others to do to you," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister was speaking after visiting the 2003/2004 Budget preparations at the Ministry of Finance Complex here tonight.

He was asked to comment on Hadi's claim that the Opposition's shadow budget was prepared with the assistance of officials from the Ministry of Finance.

Meanwhile, Minister in Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim said earlier today that legal action could be taken if it was proven that the Opposition's "budget" was drawn up with information given by Government officers.

He said action could be taken against those who leaked the information and those who received them.

"In this case, the Terengganu Menteri Besar is responsible since he should know it is against the law to possess classified Government information," he said after attending the finals of the preuniversity colloquium competition on corruption prevention.

Rais said investigations must be conducted to assess the validity of Abdul Hadi's statement.

"We cannot simply jump to conclusions. There must be an investigation to find out the source of the information."

In Kuala Terengganu, Umno Kuala Terengganu deputy chief Datuk Wan Farid Wan Salleh today urged the police to make a thorough investigation on the statement made by Hadi Awang relating to formulation of the Opposition's "budget".

Wan Farid, who is a lawyer, said it was an offence for unauthorised persons to gain access to information from a restricted Government premise like the Finance Ministry in Putrajaya.

"Secondly, he could be guilty of abetting officers to obtain information on the preparation of the Budget, which is confidential and embargoed."

Wan Farid said obviously, Abdul Hadi was unaware of the scope of the law which went beyond the pledge of loyalty made by Government officers.