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PM: We'll try and recover money paid to computer lab contractors

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PUTRAJAYA, Thurs. - The Government will exhaust all available measures and legal provisions to recover payments already made to school computer laboratory contractors whose contracts have been terminated, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said that if it was necessary, contractors might also be charged in court.

"That (recovering payments) will be worked out, we have to follow whatever rules there are.

"I'm not very sure what the procedure is. If it is necessary and if it is criminal (we might take them to court)."

Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, was asked how the Government planned to recover the funds and if it would consider legal action after attending the Association of Wives of Ministers and Deputy Ministers (Bakti) Children's Day celebrations at Seri Perdana today.

Present was Bakti president Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

Dr Mahathir said that if the failure was purely based on negligence then it would be a tedious task to recover the funds.

"We will do the necessary," he said.

Yesterday, the Cabinet terminated the services of the contractor and consultant at the centre of the school computer laboratory fiasco as both were to be "completely blamed" for the delays and shoddy workmanship.

Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad said contractor Bell Grand Sdn Bhd and project management consultant QSC Projects Sdn Bhd were completely at fault.

The Government has already made payments to contractors amounting to 80 per cent of the contract value.

The Finance Ministry has spent RM506 million for the computer lab projects nationwide.

The issue came to light after Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu disclosed that Public Works Department engineers had found that 574 of the 600 computer laboratories built in the East Coast under the school computerisation programme were unsafe and were in danger of collapse.

With yesterday's Cabinet decision, repairs of "problematic laboratories" are to be taken over by the PWD.

The Cabinet decision was made based on recommendations by a committee.

On the announced closure of the Bukit Tinggi Resort's gaming outlet, Dr Mahathir reiterated that the Government had never issued fresh casino licence to any party.

"What we approved was for the onearm bandits (slot machines) but since these electronic machines were used for other gaming activities, we decided to ban them.

"It is the same with any other club in the country, onearm bandits are allowed for club members...there is no casino," he said.

On Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, Dr Mahathir said it was unfair to accuse and portray the MCA president as someone with links to triads merely because he had posed for pictures with an alleged criminal.

"Journalists must have some ethics also, it is not fair to him (Ong)."

On the internal squabbles in Parti Bangsa Dayak Sarawak, Dr Mahathir, who is also Barisan Nasional chairman, said the BN would look into the matter.

"I don't know the details of that, we have to look into it ... we'll

have to resolve that," he said when told that 212 party branches had elected former PBDS publicity chief Datuk Seri Dr James Jemut Masing, 54, as their new president.

On June 24, Datuk Seri Daniel Tajem became the new party leader following the resignation of Datuk Amar Leo Moggie.