

PM declines to talk about Hussein's remark

JOHORE BARU, Thurs. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad declined to comment on a statement by former Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn that he (Tun Hussein) was not aware of any Cabinet decision to purchase tin on the London Metal Exchange.

Asked about the contradicting statements by him and Tun Hussein on Maminco, the Prime Minister said: "It is up to you to believe which one."

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after meet-

ing Johore Umno leaders to brief them on current developments in the country. He also met leaders of Barisan Nasional component parties at a separate session.

Tun Hussein had said yesterday that he was "not aware" of any Cabinet decision in 1980 committing the Government to enter the tin market. He said he only came to know of the tin-buying operation after he stepped down in 1981.

Tun Hussein also said that it was possible the Ca-

binet had made the decision in 1980 when he was still in office but at a time when he was away.

Dr Mahathir, in his presidential address at September's Umno general assembly, had said that the Government was the "mysterious" tin buyer and had entered the market to shore up tin prices.

He said the action was approved by Cabinet in 1980 and a private company — Maminco — was set up to carry it out. Maminco was set up in June 1981.

On Nov 10, Primary Industries Minister Datuk Dr Lim Keng Yaik told Parliament that Maminco's total losses were estimated at \$660.5 million but due to "identifiable benefits" totalling \$451.5 million, its real loss was \$209 million.

Dr Mahathir told reporters after the meeting with the Umno leaders here that he briefed them on the country's problems, particularly on the economy.

He also touched on the ways that could help ease the problems.