

28 DEC 1996

Mahathir-Muhammad

A PERSON IS INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY, SAYS PM

LANGKAWI, Dec 28 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that he is waiting for Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Taib to submit a report on the incident in which he is alleged to have failed to declare the equivalent of A\$1.2 million (RM2.4 million) in foreign currency in Brisbane.

"I uphold the principle that a person is innocent until proven guilty," the Prime Minister told a news conference before his departure at the international airport here.

He said that Muhammad had tried to contact him but so far had not been in direct contact with him.

Asked to comment on allegations that the money was linked with the Umno party election in October, Dr Mahathir said that he would like to get the true picture first before making any statements on the matter.

Muhammad, who was on holiday in Australia since Dec 16, was detained at the Brisbane international airport before his flight to New Zealand on Sunday for allegedly failing to declare the Malaysian, Singapore and New Zealand currency equivalent to A\$1.2 million he was carrying.

He appeared in the Brisbane magistrate's court the following day to face a charge under the Financial Transactions Reports Act which states that overseas travellers must declare currency if it exceeds A\$5,000 (RM10,000) before leaving the country.

No plea was entered and Muhammad, who put up bail on his own undertaking, will reappear in court on March 21.

Dr Mahathir said that he need to have ample proof and would not jump to conclusion.

"I never like to make accusations unless I can have clear proof. It's my principle...for anyone at all, that will be my stand," he said.

The Prime Minister said that he had so far only received a report from Chief Secretary to the Government Datuk Abdul Halim Ali on the matter.

"The best thing would be for me to obtain a report from the person involved," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that a decision would only be made when he was fully satisfied with the explanation given by Muhammad.

He said that he would like first of all to find out what actually happened and if there were matters that needed to be dealt with by certain authorities, he would wait until such matters had been settled.

Dr Mahathir hoped that the issue would not be exploited by interested parties and advised the people to wait for the outcome of the court case.

"If he is guilty, we will not support him," he said, adding that he also needed to study the allegations linking the money with the last Umno election.

Asked whether he was disappointed over the incident, Dr Mahathir said that he would need to know what actually happened.

"I would like to know the purpose (for carrying the RM2.4 million)," he added.

On the statement by certain parties that the cash was for Muhammad, still in New Zealand, to do some shopping, Dr Mahathir said that he would need to know from him personally as to what he wanted to buy.

The Prime Minister said that not everybody would know the procedures in foreign countries relating to the carrying of cash.

He said that such matters should be publicised through the media or in

flights like what Malaysia Airlines (MAS) was doing to inform passengers on the death sentence for dadah trafficking.

He said: "It would seem that in countries where there should be free movement, carrying a lot of cash is not allowed." -- BERNAMA

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