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Mahathir-Muhammad

MUHAMMAD ADMITTED THE MONEY WAS HIS, SAYS PM

SHAH ALAM, Dec 30 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib has acknowledged that the equivalent of RM2.4 million in cash he was carrying when he was arrested by Australian authorities in Brisbane was his.

However, Dr Mahathir said, the public including the press should not pass judgments on Muhammad before giving him a chance to explain why he was carrying so much money.

Dr Mahathir said that two things had arisen out of the incident -- the fact that Muhammad had allegedly violated Australian laws and that he was carrying so much money.

"What the public here is interested is the possibility of hanky-panky going on. So let's hear what that is before we judge.

"I would like to appeal to the press. The press is very fond sometimes of witch-hunting and it has been very bad," he said, referring to the case of former Melaka Chief Minister Tan Sri Rahim Tamby Chik.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after witnessing the rolling out of the one millionth Proton car at the Proton plant here.

The Prime Minister said Muhammad had met him last Saturday to explain himself. Muhammad, who was charged in court and freed on bail in Brisbane for allegedly failing to declare the money, also had an audience with the Sultan of Selangor over the same matter.

Dr Mahathir declined to disclose Muhammad's explanation to him regarding the money. "I need not have to explain what he has stated...he has agreed to give an explanation himself.

"What I can say is that we should be fair in dealing with what he has said. We should not, out of prejudice, jump to conclusion.

"We should be able to weigh whether what he said was true or not," he said.

Asked whether Muhammad should be relieved of all his official duties until the matter is resolved, he said: "The case is not exactly the same as that of Rahim Tamby Chik. So Muhammad must be given a chance to explain."

"I've given some directive, some advice on what he should do," he said.

On whether Muhammad had mentioned that he intended to resign, he said that Muhammad had not stated his intentions.

Asked whether he was satisfied with Muhammad's explanation, he said: "I will leave that up to you (press) to judge. I don't want to cause you to be biased."

He said Muhammad was being tried by the public based on assumptions arising from the publicity.

Further asked whether he was satisfied with Muhammad's explanation, he said: "I did not say that I am satisfied. I only commented that there has been a trend or tendency to make early judgment without taking facts into account.

"That is not fair...it is all right if we are not the target. If we are the target, we will feel that others have not been fair."

Asked whether the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) will conduct investigations into the case, Dr Mahathir said a report had been lodged with the ACA and investigations would certainly follow but if it was found that there was no case against him, everyone should accept this.

Dr Mahathir also had an audience with the Sultan of Selangor today at

the Istana Bukit Kayangan.

Meanwhile, the Sultan of Selangor said Muhammad had explained to him that the money was for the purchase of a house for his children who would be pursuing further studies in Australia.

He said that at their meeting yesterday, Muhammad also showed him some catalogues as proof of his intention to purchase a house.

However, he said, Muhammad did not disclose how he came into the money.

On Muhammad's position as Menteri Besar, the Sultan said this could only be determined by the people and the Prime Minister.

"I will only listen to the people. If the people disapprove, what can I do?" he said.

The Sultan, however, declined to elaborate on his one-hour meeting with the Prime Minister.

Asked on his feelings about the case, he said that it was of Allah's disposal and he was also leaving it to the Prime Minister to make whatever decisions on the matter. -- BERNAMA

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