

26 DEC 1996

Abu Hassan-Muhammad

MUHAMMAD TOLD BY PM TO SUBMIT REPORT ON RM2.4 MILLION CASE

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 26 (Bernama) -- Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Taib has been directed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed to submit a report on his alleged failure to declare currency totalling RM2.4 million before his departure from Brisbane.

Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Abu Hassan Omar, who is deputy chairman of the Selangor Umno liaison committee, said that Muhammad had received the message conveyed through the Prime Minister's aide.

Abu Hassan said that Muhammad, the chairman of the Selangor Umno liaison committee, informed him of the matter when he contacted him from Auckland on Tuesday morning.

Muhammad is still in Auckland and trying to book a ticket to get home as soon as possible, he told reporters after appearing as a guest over TV3's Malaysia Hari Ini programme, at Sri Pentas here.

The Menteri Besar, who was in Australia since Dec 16, was detained at the Brisbane airport before boarding a flight to New Zealand on Sunday for allegedly failing to declare currency totalling RM2.4 million which was found in his luggage.

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

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

Abu Hassan said that Muhammad was preparing the report to be submitted to the Prime Minister on his return.

He said that Muhammad told him that he would leave all decisions on his position to the Prime Minister.

"Therefore...I believe whatever decisions made by the Prime Minister will be based on Tan Sri Muhammad's report," he said.

Abu Hassan said that Muhammad or the liaison committee could not contact the Prime Minister directly on the matter and had been conveyed messages through his aide.

He said that the liaison committee would try to meet the Prime Minister on the matter and to submit a statement on its stand over the issue.

Abu Hassan said that Muhammad had also requested him to explain the incident to Selangor Umno division leaders.

Yesterday, an unofficial meeting was held among 17 Umno Selangor leaders at the official residence of Selangor State Assembly Speaker Datuk Onn Ismail and they had stated their stand to continue to stand behind Muhammad as the chairman of the liaison body and Menteri Besar.

Abu Hassan called on Umno members to remain calm over the issue and to leave it to the Prime Minister to make a decision on the matter.

"We all know that the Prime Minister is capable of making a decision that could be accepted by everyone," he said.

Asked how he felt over the matter, Abu Hassan said: "...sometimes we cannot express how sad we are, how disappointed we are, but what we can do is...remain calm and not be hasty."

Abu Hassan also reminded Umno members and investors that the policy and the stability of the Selangor government are not affected by the incident.

"The most important thing is...Tan Sri Muhammad is still the Menteri Besar and as such the policies of the Selangor government will continue

especially in efforts to turn the state into a developed state by the year 2005," he said.

Abu Hassan said that Muhammad admitted that the equivalent of A\$1.2 million (RM2.4 million) now being held by Australian federal police belonged to him.

Asked whether the incident had anything to do with Australia-Malaysia relations, Abu Hassan, who is acting Foreign Minister, said that he regarded it as an isolated case.

However, he said that he had requested the Australian Foreign Ministry to provide a report on the incident to Wisma Putra.

Meanwhile, a spokesman of the Menteri Besar's office said that Muhammad did not mention in his telephone conversation with Abu Hassan that the money belonged to him.

"We hope that this clarification could clear whatever confusion which arose," he said in a two-paragraph statement to Bernama. -- BERNAMA

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