

14 APR 1997

Muhammad-Resignation

MUHAMMAD TO REMAIN AS UMNO VICE PRESIDENT

SHAH ALAM, April 14 (Bernama) -- Tan Sri Muhammad Muhamad Taib, who resigned as Selangor Menteri Besar today, said that he will remain as Umno vice president and State Assemblyman for Batang Kali.

"These are elected posts...let the party members decide," he told a news conference at his office here.

Muhammad also said that he did not feel any guilt over the two charges he is facing in Australia.

"Some parties try to smear my name by saying that my resignation is due to the fact that I myself know that I am guilty," he said.

He said that he had to relinquish his post as Menteri Besar because it is a "public office" and on the basis that as a responsible Umno leader, he refused to allow the party and the government to be linked with his court case.

The news conference was attended by all the Barisan Nasional elected representatives, party supporters, Selangor State Assembly Speaker Datuk Onn Ismail and State Secretary Datuk Hashim Meon.

Also present was Muhammad's wife, Puan Sri Asbi Rohani Asnan.

Muhammad's resignation was announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is Umno president, after the monthly Umno Supreme Council meeting on Saturday.

Muhammad, 51, is charged with failing to declare cash equivalent to A1.2 million (about RM2.4 million) while leaving Australia for New Zealand, at the Brisbane International Airport on Dec 22, last year.

He faces another charge of making a false declaration pertaining to the cash found in his luggage, when the case comes up for hearing in August.

Muhammad said that the two charges are technical in nature and had nothing to do with corruption or related offences.

"I will fight to defend myself in the Australian court and God willing, I should be able to redeem my honour," he said.

Muhammad, who appeared calm, repeatedly stated that he did not want his case to affect the leadership's noble vision for Malaysia to become a developed nation and a model to other countries.

He also said that he had sought an audience with the Sultan of Selangor on Saturday to inform him of his decision to resign as Menteri Besar.

Muhammad also denied the Brisbane Courier Mail report that he owns a large number of property in Australia.

He said that he had instructed his lawyer to deal with such false allegations.

Muhammad also appealed to the local media not to quote "unreliable sources" in reports from Australia as it could be damaging.

Regarding his replacement, Muhammad said that he would leave the matter to Dr Mahathir.

During the transition period, he said that the state administration could proceed normally under the existing state exco line-up.

However, he said, exco meetings may not be held and big decisions would have to be postponed.

Asked why he had decided not to take leave instead, Muhammad said that the person acting as Menteri Besar may just be waiting for his term to end and would not be able to concentrate on his job.

"Give him a chance to be a full-fledged Menteri Besar...give him full powers. To me, there is no such thing as a part-time MB," he added.

The news conference ended with the "selawat" led by his political secretary, Datuk Zainal Abidin Sarkom. -- BERNAMA
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