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Muhammad-Resignation

SELANGOR MENTERI BESAR RESIGNS

KUALA LUMPUR, April 12 (Bernama) -- Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhamad Taib, who faces two charges in Brisbane in connection with his attempt to transfer RM2.4 million out of Australia, has resigned.

His resignation, effective on Monday, was announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad after the Umno Supreme Council meeting at the party headquarters here today.

Muhammad, 51, also resigned from the posts of Selangor and Federal Territory Umno liaison chief and the Selangor and Federal Territory Barisan Nasional chairman.

Muhammad, who is Umno vice president, is expected to hold a news conference to explain his position on Monday.

"It is his own wish to resign so that any investigation conducted will not affect Umno's image and we will only consider his position in the party after the decision in Brisbane on whether he is guilty or not," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said that Muhammad made his decision after having heard the views of all the Supreme Council members during a discussion on corruption and abuse of power and position.

Muhammad was appointed Menteri Besar on Aug 14, 1986.

He was detained at the Brisbane International Airport on Dec 22, last year when currency the equivalent of A\$1.2 million was found in his luggage.

He was charged in the Brisbane Magistrate's Court with attempting to transfer the A\$1.2 million in undeclared currency out of Australia, under the Financial Transactions Reports Act, 1988 which carries a maximum fine of A\$5,000 (RM10,000) or a jail term not exceeding two years or both on conviction.

At the mention of the case yesterday, the prosecution stated that Muhammad will face an additional charge of making a false declaration when his case comes up for hearing on Aug 19.

The additional charge, under the same Act, carries a maximum fine of A\$10,000 (RM20,000) or a jail term not exceeding five years or both on conviction.

Muhammad recently became the centre of controversy including being subjected to investigations by the Anti Corruption Agency (ACA) in connection with the cash found on him and his ownership of properties in Australia reported to be worth millions of ringgit.

The Brisbane Courier Mail recently exposed his acquisition of 4,500 ha of land in Currajong Park, near Brisbane, in the name of his wife, Puan Sri Asbi Rohani Asnan.

Muhammad earlier claimed that the cash belonged to his two brothers for the purchase of property in the Gold Coast.

The transaction could not proceed because they could not be present in Australia for the purpose.

He was again the target of criticism following the large-scale felling of trees for development projects in Selangor.

The Prime Minister said that Muhammad's position as the Umno vice president would be known on Monday when the Selangor Menteri Besar issues an official statement.

Umno would then determine his position in the Supreme Council, he said at the news conference also attended by Muhammad.

Asked why Muhammad had made such a decision, the Prime Minister said: "He made the decision to resign as he felt that any inquiry and investigation on him should not be linked with Umno."

Asked whether Muhammad's decision reflected his admission of guilt, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know whether it is an admission of guilt. But what he stated is that he does not want to be linked with Umno in any of the investigation."

The Prime Minister said that his replacement as the Menteri Besar, the Selangor and Federal Territory Liaison Committee chief and the Selangor and Federal Territory Barisan Nasional chairman would be decided after discussions later.

On whether the decision was appropriate, Dr Mahathir said: "It is up to him to make the decision. He has the right to make the decision".

As to whether the Supreme Council had advised Muhammad to resign, the Prime Minister said: "We debated the matter. After hearing the views of all the members, he came out with the decision."

When suggested that the charge in the Brisbane Magistrate's Court only involved his failure to declare the cash and not pertaining to corruption, Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said the charges he faced had affected the party.

"We are more concerned with Umno. He himself felt that he was responsible and it is his right to make a decision. Party members should not smear the party's name by doing something that may cast aspersions on the party," he said.

Asked whether Muhammad resigned due to pressure including from opposition parties, he said the decision made had nothing to do with any such pressure.

"Who cares about the Opposition. As if we ourselves are not responsible enough, (having to act) only on the behest of the Opposition. It is as though the Opposition has made Malaysia successful.

"If indeed Malaysia is successful because of the Opposition since the government is forced to listen to the Opposition, (then) it is (Lim) Kit Siang and (Datuk) Nik Aziz (Nik Mat) who are actually effective all this time. It looks as though we have done nothing at all," he said.

Asked to comment on Muhammad's performance since becoming Menteri Besar, Dr Mahathir said: "There is no need. There is no need for an answer."

On the position of eight state executive councillors in six states under investigation by the ACA, he said that the Supreme Council did not make any decision because there were no other information apart from press reports.

Replying to a question in the Dewan Rakyat on Wednesday, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Azmi Khalid said that the ACA was investigating three Melaka exco members, and one each from Johor, Kedah, Selangor, Pulau Pinang and Sabah. -- BERNAMA

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