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Mahathir-Perwaja

CONCRETE EVIDENCE NEEDED TO TAKE CASES TO COURT, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 8 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said cases of wrongdoing, such as that alleged to have happened in Perwaja Steel Bhd, will be taken to court only when there is concrete evidence so that the offenders receive heavy sentences.

The Prime Minister said there was no point in taking the cases to court if the offenders got away with light sentences.

"It's not easy to get a conviction in court (and even) in most cases where there is a conviction, the offender gets a light sentence -- less than six months, sometimes just one day," he told a press conference after launching a movement to consolidate the integrity system of the government's administration management, at the ACA headquarters here.

Dr Mahathir said this when asked if the ACA (Anti-Corruption Agency), while briefing him today, had touched on the agency's investigations into Perwaja.

He said the briefing did not focus on the Perwaja case on which he had already received a preliminary report.

On Dec 4 last year, ACA director-general Datuk Shafee Yahaya was reported to have said that investigations into the steel producing company involving accumulated losses of RM2.5 billion, were almost complete and were just awaiting the process of presenting the facts of the case before being passed on to the Attorney-General.

He said the agency had recorded statements from more than 50 people including former Perwaja managing-director Tan Sri Eric Chia.

Dr Mahathir said he believed the ACA had conducted thorough investigations into Perwaja.

However, he said, it was not easy for the agency to obtain everything it needed to decide whether to take the case to court or not.

Asked why this was so, Dr Mahathir said: "No enough details. If we want to go to court it's not easy. Mere suspicion is not enough. We have to have concrete evidence."

"So, if we take a case like Perwaja to court, he (the judge) will give (a jail sentence of) just one day," he said.

Asked if the ACA did not have a case against Perwaja, Dr Mahathir said ACA investigations into the company would continue.

"But you have to remember that we (ACA officers) have to go to Hong Kong, Japan (to investigate) and it is not easy to ask other people. They are not obliged to answer us," he added.

Meanwhile, Shafee told reporters that the ACA probe into Perwaja was 95 per cent completed.

"Some aspects of the case need to be referred to the Attorney-General for certain legal interpretation," he said.

The report on the case has yet to be handed over to the Attorney-General.

"It has got to depend on the outcome of the discussion with the Attorney-General as to whether to proceed with the case further or not," said Shafee. --BERNAMA

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