

05 JUN 1998

Mahathir - Muhammad

MAHATHIR TO CHECK IF FORMER SELANGOR MB DECLARED AUSTRALIAN ASSETS

KUALA LUMPUR, June 5 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he will check if former Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Haji Muhammad Taib had declared to the prime minister his Australian assets.

"I want to check first the assets which appear to be his which he mentioned in Australia have already been declared," he said at an airport press conference upon returning from a working visit to Japan.

Answering questions on Muhammad, who was acquitted by the Brisbane District Court last week of two counts of false declaration and failing to declare more than A\$1.2 million in December 1996, Dr Mahathir said: "It's the question of not coming to declare now, it's the question of whether you have that kind of assets and you declare."

Asked on the decision by the Umno disciplinary and management committee to let Muhammad declare his assets to the party president before acting further, Dr Mahathir, who is the Umno president, said that was a different issue.

"One is to declare assets to the prime minister, not to the president. The president does not ask for assets to be declared to him," he said.

He said all ministers and menteris besar must declare their assets to the prime minister every two years especially when there was an increase or change.

Asked if Muhammad had declared his Australian assets to the prime minister before this, Dr Mahathir said he could not remember as Muhammad's asset declaration was made in the last two years.

"Maybe he did because I can't go through all. I merely glanced through to see that there are properly filled and there is nothing very remarkable about it," he said.

Asked whether Muhammad had given any declaration after the Australian court case, the prime minister said he did not receive any.

Muhammad is one of Umno's three vice-presidents and had taken leave from his party post since the court trial.

The other two are Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

To a question if he was willing to meet Muhammad, Dr Mahathir said: "I can see him. He is a party member and also a vice president although he is on leave. He's welcomed to see me."

Muhammad told Malaysian journalists in Brisbane after the court's verdict that he had sold his Sovereign Island property in Australia at a loss last year and would sell the 4,400-hectare farm in Currajong Park in Queensland.

He had also said that he and his family were also planning to sell their three properties in New Zealand.

-- BERNAMA

RAZ rn