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LEAD Mahathir - Mat Taib

UMNO DISCUSSES MAT TAIB'S POSITION ON JUNE 8

KUALA LUMPUR, May 30 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said the Umno Supreme Council will discuss the position of former Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Haji Muhammad Taib in the party at its meeting on June 8.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said he could not by himself decide on Muhammad's position.

A jury in the Brisbane District Court yesterday acquitted Muhammad of two counts of falsely declaring the money he was bringing into Australia on Dec 16 1996 and failing to declare more than A\$1.26 million (RM2.9 million) when leaving for New Zealand six days later.

"That one we cannot decide until the supreme council meets. If you ask me now, how can I make a decision," said the prime minister when approached by reporters on the matter after opening the MCA's 45th general assembly here.

Muhammad resigned as Selangor Menteri Besar and took leave as Umno vice president upon being prosecuted in Australia in connection with the case.

Dr Mahathir also declined comment when asked whether he was surprised upon learning that Muhammad has properties worth millions of ringgit in Australia and New Zealand.

"I don't think I have to answer the question first until the Umno Supreme Council meets.

"In fact, as MB, he should declare his assets to me," said the prime minister.

During his trial last Monday Muhammad told the court that he had used his wife Puan Sri Asbi Rohani Hasnan's name when buying up several properties in Australia and New Zealand.

His Australian properties, the court was told, include land worth A\$460,000, a bungalow also costing A\$460,000 in Sovereign Island, Gold Coast and a farm worth A\$3.7 million in Currajong.

In New Zealand his properties include a NZ\$500,000 home and two pieces of land worth about NZ\$4 million, the court was told.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister and Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the party's management and discipline committee would deliberate on Muhammad's case at its meeting next week.

Anwar, who is committee chairman, said it would convey the outcome of that meeting to Dr Mahathir and then forward it to the Umno supreme council.

"I've discussed with the party president and we've agreed that the matter be discussed in the supreme council," Anwar told reporters after hour-long talks with the Commonwealth secretary-general Chief Emeka Anyaoku here.

Anwar had earlier met Commonwealth youth ministers who are here attending a three-day meeting ending today.

"We welcome the court's decision and we congratulate Tan Sri Muhammad," Anwar added.

Umno has two other vice-presidents namely Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

-- BERNAMA

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