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Dr Mahathir shocked over RM3b fortune

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed shock over the disclosure that his former deputy had amassed a fortune of more than RM3 billion while in office.

"I am shocked. Three billion ... don't know how he could have done this.

"It may not reach RM3 billion, but some money must be involved, if not such a claim will not be made."

He was speaking at Parliament lobby after 2000 Budget speech by First Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on yesterday's disclosure by former Bank Negara assistant governor Datuk Abdul Murad Khalid that Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's fortune, mostly held in shares and properties, were being held in trust in accounts of his cronies.

To a question, Dr Mahathir agreed that the Anti-Corruption Agency should investigate the matter.

"Surely the agency would like to ask Murad about his disclosure and the basis behind it.

"We want to know who obtains the money, how this is done and who is holding them."

Asked whether he thought the funds were to finance efforts to topple him, Dr Mahathir said it seemed that way.

On whether the confession would damage Bank Negara's credibility as Murad had admitted of being used by the former Finance Minister to champion his cause, Dr Mahathir said such a thing happened because Anwar was unscrupulous.

"When you have an unscrupulous Finance Minister, that thing can happen but now we have a good Finance Minister who is not going to do anything like that.

"Next time, we will be more careful of whom we choose as Finance Minister."

On Murad's contention that Anwar tried to crush the economy so that the country would seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund which could then force the Prime Minister to resign, Dr Mahathir said this had been suggested before.

"It is said that the reason why he is keen to follow IMF's measures is to damage the economy so that the Government will seek IMF help. This will make me very unpopular and I will have to step down and he will take over."

Dr Mahathir disagreed with claims that the disclosure was another ploy by the Government to gain support.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak described the disclosure as "a serious expose" and urged the ACA to investigate.

Najib, who is also Education Minister, said it was the responsibility of the ACA and other relevant agencies to investigate the truth of the matter.

"All this while, it is the Government which is accused of all kinds of things like practising nepotism and cronyism, but for the first time we have an expose against those who make the accusations.

"The allegations were made in a sworn affidavit. We know Datuk Murad's background. He knows he has to be responsible for what he has revealed."

Najib said investigations should be launched immediately so that "all pre-conceived notions" formed by the Opposition against the Government

would be eradicated.

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