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Mahathir-Murad

GOVT NEEDS TO INVESTIGATE MURAD'S ALLEGATIONS, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 29 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the government needs to investigate the allegations by former Bank Negara Malaysia assistant governor Datuk Abdul Murad Khalid that Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had some 20 "master accounts" worth RM3 billion.

Expressing shock over the revelation, the prime minister said he could not imagine how his former deputy could have done it.

"I'm shocked. I don't know how he could have done this," Dr Mahathir said at a press conference after First Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin tabled the 2000 Budget at Dewan Rakyat here.

Dr Mahathir was asked about Murad's allegations in a statutory declaration yesterday that the RM3 billion was for use to pursue Anwar's political ambitions.

Asked whether the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) would conduct the investigations, the prime minister said: "I think they (ACA) will obviously ask Murad the basis of his allegations."

"We'll like to know who are those who get the money, how they get it, how is the money collected and who holds the money," said Dr Mahathir.

ACA Deputy Director-General (Operations) Datuk Haji Ahmad Said Hamdan reportedly said in Kuala Terengganu today that the agency had set up a special team yesterday to investigate Murad's allegations.

Anwar, in a statement read out to reporters by his wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail at the High Court building here today, denied the allegations as baseless.

Dr Mahathir said even though the amount may not be RM3 billion, "still there was this money."

"Otherwise, this person will not be talking about it," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked about the possibility of Anwar and those named in the statutory declaration suing Murad in court, Dr Mahathir said: "Well, whether he sues or doesn't sue, I think the government needs to investigate because this involved the management of government funds."

"Surely we cannot let it go just like that," the prime minister said.

On the US-based agency which Murad alleged received US\$10 million (RM38 million) and was one of Anwar's main vehicles to promote his image in the United States and Europe, Dr Mahathir said Anwar's intention was to become popular.

The prime minister said he had been misled by Anwar into allowing him to give lectures and attend seminars organised by the agency.

Asked if Murad's allegations would affect the credibility of Bank Negara, Dr Mahathir said that was "one way of looking at it".

"But I think when you have a finance minister who is unscrupulous, then this kind of thing can happen. But we have a good finance minister now who is not going to do that kind of thing.

"Next time we will be very careful about whom we choose as finance minister," he quipped.

Asked on Murad's allegations that as the finance minister then, Anwar was using the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to sabotage the Malaysian economy and eventually to topple him (Dr Mahathir), the prime minister said:

"That was suggested before by other people ... that the reason he was keen to follow the IMF and to take measures which were damaging to the

economy was because he expected the government to ask for IMF help and then of course, we will have to accept IMF conditions.

"That may make me very unpopular and I will have to step down and let him (Anwar) take over," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked if the allegations by Murad could be construed by certain people as a "ploy" by the government, Dr Mahathir said the government was not even aware of the allegations levelled against Anwar and the others by Murad.

"We know that he (Murad) has been charged (in court). That is about all. But that he was going to come out with a statement which is very damaging to a lot of people...that is something we don't anticipate." Dr Mahathir said.

(Murad resigned from Bank Negara on Feb 1 last year and then joined RHB Bank as executive director.

He was charged in the Sessions Court here on Sept 16 1999 with failing to declare assets worth RM23 million and his is awaiting trial. He had since resigned from RHB Bank.)

Asked if he expected more revelations as the one by Murad, Dr Mahathir said he would not know.

"I am surprised to have this revelation. I think one big shock is enough," the prime minister added.

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