

20 JUN 1999

Mahathir-Umno (Petronas)

I DID NOT ASK PETRONAS TO GIVE RM2 BLN TO MIRZAN, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, June 20 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today denied the latest allegation by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim that his son Mirzan obtained RM2 billion from Petronas.

The Prime Minister said there was no evidence at all that he asked the national oil corporation to release RM2 billion to Mirzan as alleged by Anwar in a statement yesterday. Anwar was at the High Court yesterday attending his sodomy trial.

"RM2 billion is no small sum, can fill up one room. Why give to my son, you want me to die,? he said when winding up the debate at the 53rd Umno General Assembly which ended here today.

Showing to delegates a copy of Anwar's statement given to him by a reporter, Dr Mahathir said he did not know the basis of Anwar's allegation but believed it was not directed at his son but to him.

He said he would not want to smear his own name by asking Petronas to give RM2 billion for his son.

" However, some people will believe the allegations," said Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president.

He said Anwar should be charged for making baseless allegations.

Dr Mahathir said it was Malaysian International Shipping Corporation (MISC) Bhd that took over the business and acquired assets of Konsortium Perkapalan Bhd (KPB), the shipping company in which Mirzan had majority stake.

"Petronas was not involved at all in this matter," he said.

In mid August last year, KPB obtained permission from the Securities Commission to sell its shipping business and assets for US\$220 million in cash to MISC, a Petronas subsidiary. (US\$1=RM3.80)

" Although Petronas owned MISC, it did not acquire my son's shipping company which faced problems due to the economic downturn," he said.

He said KPB suffered massive losses in the process of the takeover by MISC.

Dr Mahathir said Mirzan had initially wanted to sell KPB to a Chinese company which gave a better offer.

"But I told him (Mirzan), this (KPB) is a Bumiputera company, if you sell it to a Chinese, what will the people say of me.

"I sincerely admit telling my son not to sell to a Chinese company. I'm sorry," he said.

Dr Mahathir also explained that the evaluation for the sale was done by a qualified company Chase Manhattan Bank of New York which fixed the price at US\$313 million but MISC bought it for US\$220 million.

" This caused losses," he said, adding that: " If he (Mirzan) had sold to the Chinese company, I'm sure he will not have incurred losses."

He said Anwar's sweeping allegation must be replied if not the people would say it was true that Dr Mahathir asked Petronas to give RM2 billion to Mirzan.

" It is easy (for Anwar to allege). If I can give RM2 billion to my son, why can't I give at least RM500 million to Umno," he said in jest.

" This is a slander that comes easily from Anwar's mouth. Actually, he is the one who asked Petronas because I don't have anything to do at all in matters involving my son.

"Even in Cabinet meetings, if a matter has connection with the family, the person concerned must leave (the meeting).

"I've left the meeting many times even if it involves my family only slightly.

"I'm not involved in discussions (on Mirzan's company). I don't take part in the decision-making," he said.

On the issuance of gaming licence in Sabah, Dr Mahathir refuted claims that it was First Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin who issued the licence, saying Daim was not in the Cabinet then.

He said the federal government had stopped issuing gaming licences. However, Sabah government was empowered to issue such licences.

A new regulation was introduced later requiring the Sabah government to refer to the federal government on this matter with a view to ensure no new licences were issued, he said.

Anwar, the then finance minister, used the provision to approve new gaming licences in the state, he added.

-- BERNAMA

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