

Stating the OBVIOUS!

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Howard's office involved in Haneef handling

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Dr Haneef

Former prime minister John Howard's department became involved in the handling of the Mohamed Haneef affair just days after the Indian-born doctor was arrested over a UK terror plot, a tribunal has heard.

At a hearing before the Commonwealth Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) in Brisbane today, it was revealed representatives of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet met with immigration and foreign affairs officials on July 4, 2007, two days after Dr Haneef's arrest.

From the meeting, the various departments prepared an options paper detailing possible courses of action, depending on whether federal police decided to lay charges against the Indian-born doctor.

Dr Haneef was finally charged with supporting terrorism on July 14 and granted bail by a Brisbane magistrate two days later.

Within hours of the magistrate's decision, then immigration minister Kevin Andrews cancelled the Gold Coast-based doctor's work visa, preventing his release.

However, the case against Dr Haneef collapsed within a fortnight and he was permitted to return to his family in Bangalore, where he now lives.

Mr Howard has previously denied any involvement in the matter.

However, lawyers for Dr Haneef said the involvement of Mr Howard's department raised the

possibility the former prime minister may have colluded with his immigration minister to create a political storm similar to the Tampa controversy which helped the coalition win the 2001 election.

"I would think that, given his department was involved, he (Mr Howard) would have been briefed by senior advisers," lawyer Rod Hodgson told reporters outside the court today.

"One can have a view whether it was to Howard's political benefit to whip up a storm like he did with Tampa."

Dr Haneef's legal team today appealed to the AAT for the release of the options paper and other documents being withheld by the Department of Immigration.

Government lawyers this morning agreed to provide more than 250 of the estimated 280 documents sought by Dr Haneef's legal team, but excluded 15 documents it claimed were exempted from freedom of information legislation.

They argued some of the documents were protected by law while it was not in the public interest for others to be released.

A witness for the government, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet first assistant secretary Angus Campbell, said the options paper was an initial draft.

"The document is incomplete - it contained factual inaccuracies later identified by some of the departments," he told the tribunal.

Mr Hodgson said the action had been launched to assist the inquiry into the handling of the case, led by John Clarke, QC, which does not have the power to force departments or agencies to provide documents.

The tribunal heard most of the disputed documents have been provided to the Clarke inquiry, however two documents protected by the Migration Act have yet to be handed over.

The hearing continues tomorrow.

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Cleaves Alternative News. <http://cleaves.lingama.net/news/story-1117.html>