

I've 'very little' knowledge of Project IC, says Mahathir

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By S Pathmawathy

Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad today skirted the issue of citizenship being given to illegal immigrants in the 1990s, asserting that he had “very little” knowledge on the matter.

“It happened, I’m quite sure it happened, just like other crimes that were also happening during other people’s tenure, but that doesn’t mean that they are guilty,” he said today.

Mahathir (right in photo), who administered the country for 22 years, was asked to respond to the recently announced royal commission of inquiry to investigate claims that some hundreds of thousands foreigners were given Malaysian citizenship.

However, the country's longest-serving prime minister reasoned that monitoring the movement of immigrants was a difficult task during that period.

“If you find me responsible, I will be answerable for it, but these things happened at a time when our ability to oversee movements of people (was restricted), especially people who have been always been very mobile, like the Bajau Laut (seafarers),” he said.

The RCI to probe allegations of illegal immigrants being given citizenship and the right to vote, famously known as ‘Project IC’, was among the suggestion proposed by the parliamentary select committee on electoral reform in February.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak finally made the much-delayed announcement last week, however, terms of reference have yet to be outlined.

For centuries they (the Bajaus) have been moving between the Philippines and Malaysia so it’s possible that a lot of them, came to Malaysia, because it is attractive to them.

“But we see this happening everywhere, in Europe, everywhere. When a country is prosperous, everyone wants to migrate to that country,” said Mahathir.

Asked whether he would assist in the RCI probe, Mahathir said: “I don’t know what I can testify. If I have any knowledge that they want, I’m quite willing, I can go to the courts to tell them whatever I know, but I must admit that I don’t know very much.”

Proponents have been campaigning for the royal commission to re-look into the special immigration visit pass IMM13 for some 84,000 refugees affected by civil war in the Philippines in the 1970s.

They were said to have been accorded with the Malaysian citizenship in the 1990s and their names added to the electoral roll, resulting in an unusual surge in the Sabah population.

It was also known as Project M, with 'M' standing for Mahathir, who has been accused of spearheading the project.

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