

Dr M: I'll probably be dead before case ends due to 'irrelevant' questions

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Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad has expressed frustration over the questions posed to him in court today, saying they had “nothing to do” with his claims in the RM150 million defamation suit against Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

The centenarian told the Shah Alam High Court that at the rate the defendant’s legal team was going with their line of questioning, he would be dead before the case reached its conclusion.

This came while Mahathir was being cross-examined by Anwar’s lawyer Ranjit Singh this afternoon on his testimony, particularly where the former Langkawi MP claimed Anwar’s alleged remarks had affected his status as a statesperson (negarawan).

The line of questioning included the defeat of Mahathir’s former political party Pejuang in the Johor by-election and the 15th general election in 2022, where its candidates, including Mahathir, lost their deposits.

“I would like to point out that the line of questioning has nothing to do with my complaint that Anwar defamed me.

“He (Ranjit) is talking about my character, whether I’m a good man or a bad man. If I commit a crime, I commit a crime and Anwar accuses me of committing a crime, that I stole money, enrich myself (and) my children, that I don’t pay tax (and) send money abroad.

“These are the accusations against me that I claim are defamatory. But so far, I’m being asked about my character. If I commit a crime, I commit a crime, and I am equal before the law,” Mahathir said.

‘It will take 10-15 years’

He further said to judicial commissioner Donald Joseph Franklin that Ranjit’s line of questioning could take up to 15 years to finish.

“I don’t have time, Your Honour, because I am 100 years old. I cannot answer all these questions.

“It will take 10 or 15 years at the rate it’s going. I’m not a lawyer, but I believe there is a saying, ‘Justice delayed is justice denied’.

“Probably I’ll be dead before this case is finished, so I will not get justice while I’m living,” he said.

Mahathir added that he hoped Ranjit’s questions would return to the issues raised in his statement of claim.

Ranjit responded that any objection should come from Mahathir’s legal team.

“You are right that you are not a lawyer. I don’t have to explain myself to the witness, but maybe, out of courtesy to you, your case is that you are a negarawan and that you have a reputation and whatnot. This is in your witness statement and statement of claim.

“As the defendant’s lawyer, I am entitled to challenge that assertion. We also challenged it in our defence.

“It will not take 15 years, I can assure you,” he said.

RM100 alleged bribe

Ranjit then referred to Mahathir’s remarks in a podcast on Nov 13, 2023, where the former prime minister claimed Langkawi voters did not support him in GE15 due to bribery.

“If voters can be bought for a mere RM100 to vote against you, despite what you’ve done for Langkawi, then the reality is that you never had this good reputation that you claimed. Do you agree or disagree?” the lawyer asked.

Mahathir remained silent, prompting Ranjit to repeat his question four times before Mahathir replied: “Nothing to do with my reputation, it’s all RM100.”

Mahathir’s lawyers Rafique Rashid Ali and Nizam Bashir also objected to Ranjit’s questions, arguing that they were not relevant to Mahathir’s complaint.

Malay powers

Lawyer Razlan Hadri Zulkifli then took over the cross-examination, where he challenged Mahathir’s claims that “Malays are losing power under Anwar’s governance”.

He asked if there were recent amendments to the Federal Constitution that could “weaken, shrink or reduce Malay powers”.

Razlan: I am asking you, is there any amendment to our supreme law, under the defendant’s administration, that would weaken, reduce or shrink the Malay’s privileges/power?

Mahathir: There are some.

Razlan: There is? What is it?

Mahathir: The issue of Malay power does not arise. The issue with the law does.

Razlan repeated his question several times before Mahathir answered “disagree”.

The plaintiff’s counsel objected to the line of questioning, arguing that it was unrelated to the complaints in the suit.

Razlan, however, continued and asked again whether there had been any constitutional amendments under the current administration.

Mahathir said there were amendments where the government had introduced laws concerning 3R (religion, race and royalty) issues, which he claimed prevented public discourse on matters related to Malays.

Razlan then asked if the rules on 3R issues were passed under Anwar’s administration.

“It is not a law, but it is in power, such as one,” Mahathir replied.

The hearing was then adjourned for the day and will resume on Oct 29.

'Baseless' claims

Mahathir filed the suit against Anwar on May 3, 2023, claiming the prime minister's remarks were false, baseless, and aimed at creating a negative perception of him.

In his witness statement, Mahathir said Anwar's remarks referred to him as he is the only person in Malaysia to have served twice as prime minister.

He said the allegations "tainted my image as a statesman who was the former prime minister (twice) and my reputation as a respected politician and leader in Malaysia and worldwide".

Mahathir is seeking RM50 million in general damages and RM100 million in exemplary damages, as well as a written apology, the immediate retraction of the statements, five percent annual interest on the damages from the date of filing until full payment, and any other relief deemed fit by the court.

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