

Project M: Not me, not Umno, but others
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Fauwaz Abdul Aziz

Dr Mahathir Mohamad revealed that "some people" were involved in issuing identity cards to foreigners in Sabah but denied the ruling Umno was involved in the secret plan allegedly to pad up the electoral rolls with illegal immigrants.

When pressed on whether he had any knowledge of the plan to give ICs to foreigners to vote for Umno, the former premier said: "No. Not me."

The wily octogenarian similarly dodged further attempts to get a definitive answer to the many questions surrounding the 'Project M' allegedly bearing his initial.

"It's nice to have 'M'. At one time, there was even an MM government," he said with his trademark sarcasm in reference to the period when he and former deputy premier Musa Hitam led the government.

It has been claimed that as a result of the secret project - sometimes referred to as 'Project Mahathir' or 'Project IC' - there are about 1.75 million foreigners in Sabah today as compared to 1.5 million locals.

According to the claims, a secret meeting was held in Kuala Lumpur to discuss the project attended by, among others, the then deputy home minister Megat Junid Megat Ayub and chief secretary to the government, Ahmad Sarji.

Ahmad was said to have opposed the plan, but told that Mahathir had already given his approval.

Speaking to malaysiakini editors at a recent interview in his Perdana Leadership Foundation office in Putrajaya, 81-year-old Mahathir disclosed that some individuals in Sabah may have been involved in the issuance of ICs to foreigners to secure votes for Umno.

The ex-premier who had been in power for 22 years however dismissed suggestions that any such project was sponsored by Umno or the government.

"Certainly not. Some people with an interest in doing so may have, maybe for money."

I want to censor the Net but...

On another matter, Mahathir said his pledge not to censor the Internet was a move that was - and remains - against his better judgement.

He said he was "forced" to do so by the Multimedia Super Corridor's International Advisory Panel - comprising top information technology experts - to secure foreign investors' help in developing the ambitious Silicon Valley-type project.

"Even at that time, I wanted to censor the Internet because I think the Internet is undermining moral values," he added, referring to the proliferation of smut.

"At that time, it wasn't so bad. Now, it's really, really bad," he said. But he was quick to add that his ideas of censoring the Internet did not apply to "contrary views".

"I don't mean censor contrary views. Contrary views is okay, but censor those filthy and dirty things," he said.

Islamic state declaration

Mahathir also denied widely-held claims that the recent heightening of religious tensions had anything to do with his declaration that Malaysia was an Islamic state in September 2001.

On the contrary, he said, the frayed ties between Muslims and non-Muslims were because of religious authorities' misinterpretation of the religion as well as their failure to adhere the true teachings of Islam.

"It has to nothing to do with the Islamic state - this increase in tensions. It's just because you don't explain things properly to the other side," said Mahathir.

"These things become a problem because of interpretations. Go back and find out what is it that Islam wants you to do in such cases. Go back to the Quran. It's there."

Mahathir does not believe that the forced separation of spouses and between parents and children on grounds of religion - such as the case of R Subashini - is sanctioned by the Quran.

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