

Dr M: I thought tear gas hit me

NST-7/5/2007.

■ By Alina Simon and
Sulaiman Jaafar
news@nst.com.my

KOTA BARU: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad told the magistrate's court here yesterday that he had initially thought that he had been hit by tear gas fired by police on July 28 last year.

The former prime minister said it was only later that he was told that he had been affected by pepper spray used by Datuk Nik Sapeia Nik Yusoff.

Dr Mahathir was testifying against Nik Sapeia, 53, who is accused of intentionally causing hurt to him and three other men at the Sultan Ismail Petra airport in Pengkalan Chepa on July 28 last year.

The trio are former state Umno strongman Datuk Paduka Ibrahim Ali, businessman Suberi Sahidan and Dr Mahathir's personal physician Datuk Dr Mohd Nasir Muda.

Smartly clad in a dark Nehru suit, Dr Mahathir was a picture of calm as he began testifying.

Describing himself as a pensioner, the 82-year-old took about an hour to answer questions from both deputy public prosecutor Raja Rozela Raja Toran and defence counsel Zainal Abidin Mustaffa.

Replying to questions from Raja Rozela, Dr Mahathir said a man had tried

Dr Mahathir has known Nik Sapeia for about 20 years and considers him a friend.

to prevent him from entering a Mitsubishi Pajero outside the airport when he came here last year for two functions organised by Ibrahim and local politician Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad.

The man whom he described as plump and wearing a black jacket, tried to steer him in another direction but was prevented by his bodyguards.

When he got into the vehicle, Dr Mahathir said he was hit by the spray as he was about to stand through the sunroof to speak to the crowd.

"I couldn't breathe. I lost my voice as my throat hurt. I felt so weak, I couldn't even stand," he said, adding that

one of his bodyguards pulled him out and into another car which took him back to his hotel.

Dr Mahathir said that it was only afterwards that his aide-de-camp Deputy Supt Mazli Mazlan told him the identity of his attacker.

"My ADC told me Nik Sapeia had done it," he said.

Dr Mahathir, however, said he did not lodge a police report as he did not consider it serious as he had recovered from the experience.

Later, in reply to a question from Zainal Abidin, Dr Mahathir said he had known Nik Sapeia for about 20 years and considered him a friend.

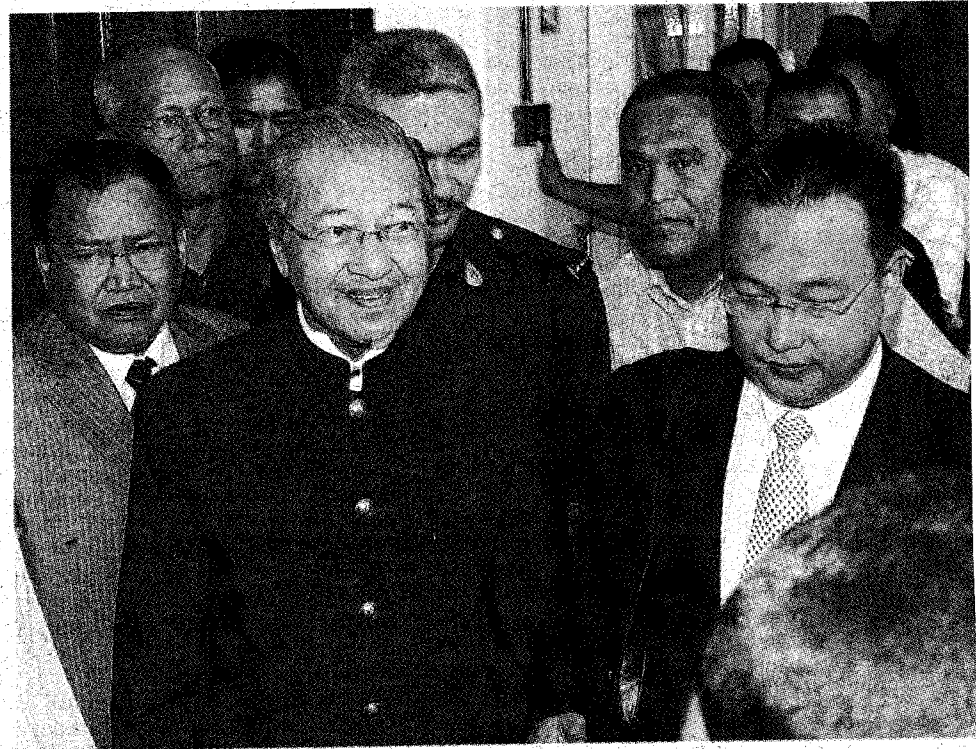
He said that he initially planned to travel in Nik Sapeia's vehicle upon arrival at the airport but decided to use the Pajero supplied by Ibrahim to address the crowd for a while.

When the attack occurred, Dr Mahathir said he thought that the police had sprayed tear gas as they used it as part of crowd control measures.

When they reached the hotel, Dr Mahathir said he saw Nik Sapeia in the lift but did not know how he had got there.

Nik Sapeia, who was present during proceedings, kept his head down while listening to the testimony.

The hearing before magistrate Mohd Azman Mustapha continues today.



Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad (centre) arriving at the magistrate's court in Kota Baru yesterday. — NST picture by Syamsi Suhaimi