



Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad arriving at the High Court for the inquiry yesterday morning.

# No sarcasm, caustic wit in Dr M's 90-min testimony

11th witness

■ Former chief justice Tun Eusoff Chin takes the witness stand today.

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he was not influenced by anyone when deciding whether to approve or reject judicial candidates, but took into account the views of a variety of people.

During his testimony at the Royal Commission of Inquiry on the Lingam video clip, Dr Mahathir said there was no one specific, but these sources of information included senior civil servants, police personnel and ACA officers.

Sometimes, he said, he also listened to views expressed at social gatherings.

When counsel Christopher Leong, appearing for the Malaysian Bar, pointedly asked him whether businessman Tan Sri Vincent Tan Chee Youn was one of his sources,

Dr Mahathir replied: "Could be."

He also admitted to knowing Tan "very well".

Tan was one of the names mentioned in the Lingam tape as purportedly having a role in deciding judicial appointments.

Earlier, Leong pointed out that Dr Mahathir had not agreed to recommendations made by then chief justice Tun Dzaiddin Abdullah in August 2002 for the late Tan Sri Abdul Malek Ahmad to be made chief judge of Malaya.

He asked: "What were the reasons for not agreeing to Tan Sri Malek as the chief judge of Malaya?"

"I have no reasons," said Dr Mahathir.

"After listening to what people say, to their views, I form my own conclusions and I make my decisions. I don't tell people why.

"I don't have to explain why.

The prerogative lies with me. I don't have to tell why."

"We have a position here that the recommendation of a chief justice who is most familiar with the best qualities of his brother judges is rejected," Leong said.

"The information you obtained to make your decision, Tun, must have been very important to override the CJ. Who is your source?" he asked.

It was then that Dr Mahathir said he had no specific sources but he did take into account views of civil servants, senior police personnel and ACA officers.

Leong then asked: "Would Vincent Tan be one of your sources?"

"Could be," replied Dr Mahathir.

Before he stepped down, commission member Datuk Mahadev Shanker asked: "Were the reasons for reject-

ing Tan Sri Malek ever discussed with Dzaiddin?"

Dr Mahathir reiterated that he did not explain the reasons behind his decisions.

"When I obtain views from people, I make my own assessments, then make my decisions. I don't tell anyone why."

"Not even to the CJ who recommended them to you?" Mahadev asked.

"No," Dr Mahathir replied.

Dr Mahathir, 82, is the ninth witness for the inquiry tasked with investigating a 14-minute clip of prominent lawyer Datuk V. K. Lingam allegedly brokering judicial appointments with former chief justice Tun Ahmad Fairuz Sheikh Abdul Halim.

He was the first witness yesterday in day four of the hearing.

Like the day before, when Dr Mahathir was originally scheduled to appear, a large crowd had already gathered

by 7.30am.

Two queues had formed outside the courtroom — one for the press and another for the public.

The line for the public was twice the length of the press queue, but due to the limited number of entry passes, many of them were unable to get in.

After being screened, observers were allowed to enter the courtroom at 9.40am.

Shortly after, a court officer placed a box of tissues, a glass and bottle of mineral water on the witness stand.

Proceedings began at 10am and Dr Mahathir emerged from a side room.

Dressed in a grey suit, a white shirt and a blue-grey tie, he walked slowly to the stand after bowing to the commission members.

Representing him were lawyers Datuk Tengku Sofiah Jewa, Datuk Dr Yaacob Hussein Merican and Datuk

N. Chandran.

Addressing the commission, Tengku Sofiah said Dr Mahathir had given his assurance that he would render his fullest co-operation to the inquiry.

"Our client has told us that he will respond to all questions to the best of his ability.

"He is also prepared to answer questions which, in law, are not relevant or within the terms of reference of the inquiry," she said.

In a voice which quivered slightly, Dr Mahathir took oath. He did not drink from the glass before him and appeared somewhat weary throughout his testimony.

Dr Mahathir replied to every question in a calm voice, smiling occasionally, but there was none of the caustic wit or sarcasm that he is known for.

His testimony ended in 90 minutes.