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Dr Mahathir: Charge me, I want my day in court

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Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad says he welcomes any investigations into the allegations

■ **By Sheridan Mahavera**
news@nst.com.my

JOHOR BARU: Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he would not settle for less than his day in court so that he could defend himself against allegations he was at the centre of a judicial appointments scandal in 2001.

He hoped that when investigations into the conspiracy were completed, which also involved a lawyer, a tycoon and a former minister, he would be charged.

Dr Mahathir said he would then reveal what really went on behind the scenes at the time, including instances of judges lobbying him for promotions.

He told a press conference here he did not want the probe to end with the authorities concluding "there is no case" against him.

"Because people will then think that I lobbied to get off. Put me in court and let me explain.

"I don't believe I did anything wrong but if they feel that I am guilty, I will accept any punishment.

"I welcome any investigations against me. I only ask that they charge me in court and I hope that the judge will allow me to speak," Dr Mahathir said after attending a seminar here on the results of the 12th general election.

In January, the former prime minister had also promised full co-operation with the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Lingam video clip, but his answers turned out to be less than forthcoming.

He told the commission he was not answerable in his prerogative to appoint superior court judges and could not remember important details behind his decision-making.

Dr Mahathir was responding to the publishing of the commission's report, and the government's decision to begin investigations into the six figures named for conspiring to fix the appointments and promotions of judges.

Aside from Dr Mahathir, the others are lawyer Datuk V.K. Lingam, former chief justices Tun Ahmad Fairuz Sheikh Abdul Halim and Tun Eusoff Chin, tycoon Tan Sri Vincent Tan and former tourism minister Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Mansor.

The commission said "there was an insidious movement by Lingam with the assistance of his close friends, Tan and Tengku Adnan, to involve themselves actively in the appointment of judges".

Dr Mahathir said that despite lobbying from certain judges, he decided on appointments based on his assessments of the candidates.

"It was not just judges who lobbied. People lobbied to be ministers and election candidates. I listened to them but I made my own decisions. I did not know lobbying was a crime.

"I also did not want to be a postman, where the chief justice hands me a recommendation for a judge and I hand it over to the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong.

"I would also scrutinise the candidate and if I found that he was not capable, I would not support his appointment."

Dr Mahathir was here to continue his campaign to oust Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Growing increasingly strident as support for a rebellion against Abdullah ebbs, Dr Mahathir accused party chiefs who backed the incumbent of being "traitors" to the Malay community.