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## Dr M admits giving ICs to Sabah immigrants

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**SHAH ALAM:** Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohammad has admitted that Malaysian identity cards (IC) were issued to immigrants in Sabah under his administration.

He however denied that the project was illegal as all procedures were according to laws enacted under the federal constitution.

Mahathir, who was premier from 1981 to 2003, said he is willing to testify at the ongoing Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) into Illegal Immigration in Sabah if called, but said no one has called him yet.

"I admit that I gave (citizenship) during my time," he told a press conference after giving a speech at the Karangkraf headquarters here yesterday.

"The problem is some quarters are uncomfortable with that."

Mahathir stressed that the immigrants are also a part of the diverse cultures in Sabah.

"Many people in Sabah have been there for not just one or two days, but for 20 or 30 years. They spoke Malay language and fulfilled requirements to be Malaysian citizens," he reasoned.

The 87-year-old statesman did not disclose the number of citizenship cards given out, or the official name of the project which has come to be known as "Project IC".

Mahathir claimed that the country's first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, gave one million citizenship cards to immigrants in Peninsular Malaysia after Independence in 1957.

"Tunku Abdul Rahman is worse than me. He gave one million citizenship without proper tests and checks. But no one talks about it," he said.

Mahathir, who was also home minister when in power, also denied allegations that the ICs in Sabah were issued under orders from the late Tan Sri Megat Junid Megat Ayub who was then deputy home minister, two weeks before the state election in 1994.

Former Sabah National Registration Department (NRD) director Ramli Kamarudin had told the RCI on Wednesday that Megat Junid had told him to issue NRD receipts to match the names and IC numbers of the immigrants in Sabah so as to allow them to vote.

Mahathir said the timing may have been coincidental.

"Either (the timing) was coincidental or deliberate, I wouldn't know. However, what was done is permitted by law," he said yesterday.

"It is their (immigrants') right once they become citizens. It is their right to support whoever they choose, whether BN (Barisan Nasional) or anyone," he added.