

UNFAZED BY GRILLING

DR M: I'M NOT ASHAMED OF MY INDIAN ANCESTRY

But that does not mean I am not Malay, says ex-PM

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AT 99 years old, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad demonstrated his strength and resilience as he withstood hours of intense questioning by a lawyer in the courtroom yesterday.

The former prime minister even refused a brief respite, insisting on continuing his testimony when lawyer Mohamed Shahrul Fazli Kamarulzaman requested a short break.

"We can continue," Dr Mahathir said calmly before High Court judicial commissioner Gan Techiong.

Dr Mahathir's response seemed to impress the court when Gan quipped: "Strong

man...99 years old."

The senior statesman also drew occasional laughter with his candid and humorous responses.

Dr Mahathir was testifying as a witness in his defamation suit against Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi for remarks made in 2017, alleging his real name was "Mahathir a/l Iskandar Kutty".

Shahrul, who appeared for the deputy prime minister, bombarded Dr Mahathir with questions, which he answered calmly.

Shahrul: You have 10 siblings... who is still alive?

Dr Mahathir: I am. I'm still alive.

The former Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia chairman, however, became stern when addressing questions about Zahid's disputed statement.

The plaintiff emphasised that he was not embarrassed about having Indian ancestry and was focused on Zahid's remarks about "Mahathir a/l Iskandar Kutty".

On Monday, Dr Mahathir told the court that his late father, Mo-

hamad bin Iskandar, was from Penang and was Malay, with ancestors who had roots in the southern Indian state of Kerala.

"When I was prime minister, when I went to Pakistan, they said I was Pakistani. When I went to Bangladesh, they said I was Bangladeshi. When I went to Sri Lanka, they said I was Sri Lankan.

"That is their belief and what they think, but it's not true. My father was born and registered as a Malay from Malaysia.

"I'm not ashamed to say I have Indian heritage, but that does not mean I am not Malay," he said, adding that he was unaware of his grandfather's or great-grandfather's lineage as this was never discussed within his family.

"The suit is not questioning whether Mahathir and Iskandar are Muslim names, but rather addressing the accusation related to my real name."

He challenged the defendant (Zahid) to present evidence in court, showing his identity card that states his real name is "Mahathir a/l Iskandar Kutty".



Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad says his defamation suit against Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi is about addressing the accusation related to his real name. PIC BY ROHANIS SHUKRI

He issued the challenge while questioning Shahrul's line of inquiry, claiming the lawyer asked repetitive questions about his ancestry, which he considered irrelevant to the case.

"The case I filed is about whether Zahid lied and whether his statement was defamatory.

"I dare him to prove that I am not Mahathir bin Mohamad.

"I did not take (legal) action against others, but only against what he (Zahid) said.

"Show my IC (MyKad) to me. (Other questions) are not relevant... I will not answer."

This prompted the judge to intervene and told the plaintiff to answer the lawyer's questions.

Gan: You are someone with a clear mind. I am sure everyone here is impressed with you. I hope you can cooperate by answering the lawyer's questions.

Dr Mahathir: But it's irrelevant.

Gan: With all due respect, Tun, before July 2017, the date this suit was filed, there were articles that stated your name was Mahathir a/l Iskandar Kutty. They (the lawyers) have the right to ask. They are trying to show that the defendant (Zahid) was not the

first to raise this.

Dr Mahathir: Many articles written are not true. They emphasised that my grandfather's name was Kutty. I have answered that.

Gan: This is an adversarial system, that is how it works. You are here as a witness, and the defendant's lawyers have the right to ask cross-examination questions. The process is that after this, there will be a re-examination by your lawyer for clarification.

Dr Mahathir: I will answer, but they keep asking the same questions.

At that point, the lawyer requested the proceedings to be adjourned to Oct 14 as it was almost 4.30pm.

On July 20, 2022, Dr Mahathir filed the suit, naming Zahid, who is Umno president, as defendant.

His suit states that the plaintiff genuinely believes the defendant's reference in the alleged defamatory statement to "that person", "he", and "Mahathir, the son of Iskandar Kutty", explicitly refers to him.

Dr Mahathir said his status as a statesman and a politician was tarnished as a result.