

'MAHATHIR A/L ISKANDAR KUTTY' SUIT

# DR M: ZAHID'S WORDS HURT MY IMAGE

Ex-PM says he initially refrained from legal action in hopes of getting apology

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**T**UN Dr Mahathir Mohamad held his ground in court yesterday, branding Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi's remarks on "Mahathir a/l Iskandar Kutty" as vicious and malicious.

The former prime minister, who appeared irked by the repetitive line of questioning by Zahid's lawyer Mohamed Shahrul Fazli Kamarulzaman, described Zahid's 2017 statement as a calculated attempt to undermine his credibility and tarnish his legacy as a statesman.

"If I were just selling *kacang putih* by the roadside, I would not

care. But as a political leader, this kind of attack is malicious and damaging.

"In politics, there are ways to undermine a rival, but to try and destroy public trust in me is wrong. His words affected many, sparking interest and impacting my image," he said under cross-examination by Shahrul Fazli before judicial commissioner Gan Tetchiong.

Shahrul Fazli suggested that Zahid's contested, remarks were just a political manoeuvre, a claim that Dr Mahathir rejected.

Dr Mahathir said while many political manoeuvres existed, Zahid's intentions were malicious, vicious, deceitful and harmful.

Questioned about the timing of public reactions on social media



Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad says while many political manoeuvres exist, Zahid's intentions behind the 'Mahathir a/l Iskandar Kutty' remarks were vicious and malicious. NSTP PIC BY ASYRAF HAMZAH

which mostly appeared in 2022, five years after the initial statement, he argued that Zahid's words had lasting repercussions.

"If Zahid never made that statement, there would be no lawsuit. The comments and reactions are direct results of what he said," said Dr Mahathir.

The defence also suggested that if the former prime minister had not filed the suit, the reactions in 2022 would not have existed.

Dr Mahathir disagreed with the lawyer's suggestion, saying: "You are suggesting that suing people is wrong. I have explained why I took time to pursue this legally. If people did not know what Zahid said, they would not comment."

The former Langkawi member of parliament said he initially refrained from legal action, believing Zahid would acknowledge his comments and issue an apology.

"He used to work under me when I was Umno president, and he was the Youth chief. So, I hoped he would remember that."

**Shahrul Fazli:** This "hope" was not directly communicated to Zahid?

**Dr Mahathir:** I could not just go up to him and say "please apologise". I was not going to do that. If he wanted to (apologise), he could have done so.

**Shahrul Fazli:** Did you convey your hope? Or at least what you were asking of him?

**Dr Mahathir:** I expressed my hope, but not directly to him. I also conveyed it in a letter, but he did not respond. So, we had to take action.

On July 20, 2022, Dr Mahathir filed the suit, naming Zahid as the defendant.

He claimed that the plaintiff genuinely believed that the defendant's reference in the alleged defamatory statement to "that person", "he" and "Mahathir, the son of Iskandar Kutty", explicitly referred to him.

The statement made him out to be a liar, untrustworthy, selfish and unethical while holding public office and unfit to be a leader or public figure, he claimed.