

# Dr M butts heads with Anwar's lawyers over 'unrelated' issues

**SHAH ALAM:** Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad appeared frustrated with the line of questioning by the legal team of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim during cross-examination in his RM150 million defamation suit yesterday.

The trial before High Court judicial commissioner Donald Joseph Franklin began with Anwar's lawyer, Razlan Hadri Zulkifli, questioning the former prime minister on whether there had been any attempts to amend the Federal Constitution in ways that limited or diminished the powers and privileges of the Malays.

Razlan asked Dr Mahathir if Anwar had specifically said he would amend the Federal Con-

stitution to declare Malaysia as a multiracial country instead of Tanah Melayu.

The former Langkawi member of parliament replied in the negative.

Further questioned by Razlan on whether there were documents or proof showing that the Malays, under Anwar's administration, had lost their power or that it had been limited or reduced, Dr Mahathir appeared irritated and did not mince his words.

In a loud and stern tone, he said he had not complained about what had happened to the Malays.

"What I have complained about (in the suit) were the accusations that I purportedly stole money —

the government memory — and was involved in cronyism.

"This is what made me take this legal action because it has impacted my reputation as a leader of the country," he said.

Hearing this, Donald asked Dr Mahathir to answer Razlan's question with a simple yes or no.

Dr Mahathir stood by his words, saying, "That is my answer."

Razlan retorted that it was not his question and attempted to repeat it before being cut off by Dr Mahathir.

"The question has nothing to do with my case. I will answer on my case, which I initiated because he defamed me. How did he defame me? He said I stole money. He said I am a scoundrel and supposedly, I am wealthy by the billions. He has not shown any proof yet. He asked to be given two weeks to do so, but now it has been two years," he said.

Dr Mahathir's lawyer, Nizam Bashir, lamented that the trial was nowhere near the "sting" of the suit, which centred on allegations that a person who was in power for 22 years and 22 months had amassed billions of ringgit of the nation's wealth for his family and children, evaded taxes and stashed the money overseas.

"The defendants (Anwar and his legal team) are veering off course. We are now talking about politics, amending the Federal



Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Shah Alam High Court yesterday. NSTP PIC BY FAIZ ANUAR

Constitution and, to be very candid, I was troubled by what happened on the first day of the trial.

"Dr Mahathir was subjected to 200 questions on his reputation and that he is not a statesman," he said.

Donald reminded Anwar's lawyers not to veer away from the main issues and asked when the cross-examination would finally reach the crux of the defamation.

At this juncture, Razlan's co-counsel, Ranjit Singh, rose and said his client was entitled to the best defence and that Dr Mahathir's lawyers could not dictate how the cross-examination should proceed.

To this, Donald said the questions must be relevant to the suit and that it was not necessary to re-establish every pleading, "or else everyone will be sitting in court for the next 20 years".

When the trial resumed after lunch, Nizam said the relevance of the questions was a major issue.

Donald then ruled that, moving forward, he would decide on the relevance of questions and both parties would have to abide by his rulings.

The judicial commissioner adjourned the proceedings and set Nov 11 for case management to fix further trial dates.