

## **Najib backs Dr M, says aid request allegations 'nonsense'**

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**By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal**

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 20 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak today backed Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's denial of having previously requested loans from the World Bank, and described the allegations against the former prime minister as "nonsense."

Earlier today, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia has taken World Bank aid since 1958, but stressed he had never personally written a letter or verbally requested for such funds.

"(I can say that) any claims that he (Dr Mahathir) had written a letter (requesting aid from the World Bank) was nonsense (mengarut belaka).

"Tun Dr Mahathir saved the economy in 1999... he would not have surrendered the country to the controls of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) under any circumstances," said the prime minister during his speech at a gala dinner event honouring Dr Mahathir here. Dr Mahathir has been engaging in a verbal war over the past week with Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and PKR leaders over their respective roles and actions during the Asian Financial Crisis.

The former premier issued a challenge last week to Opposition Leader Anwar over allegations of a purported letter that the former had written to the World Bank to appeal for funds during the financial crisis.

PKR has since produced World Bank records showing that Dr Mahathir's administration had accepted financial aid numerous times from May 18, 1982 to Malaysia's post-financial crisis period of March 30, 1999.

This includes three loans for projects inked six months after Anwar was sacked as deputy prime minister in September 1998.

Dr Mahathir said earlier today any claim that he wrote to the World Bank was baseless. He added that Malaysia had borrowed from the World Bank since 1958.

The last negotiation for loans, he said, was in 1997, but the funds were not disbursed until 1999.

Dr Mahathir added that he was prepared to swear on the Quran that he never asked personally for World Bank loans.

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