

**Dr Mahathir denies knowledge of Project IC**  
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**BY LEE SHI-IAN**

Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad (pic) today said he had never heard of Project IC until recently nor had he given orders to issue ICs indiscriminately to illegal immigrants in Sabah.

Dressed in a grey suit with a red tie and purple shirt, the 88-year-old Dr Mahathir raised a round of laughter from a packed courtroom when he wryly said "Thank you very much" to consulting officer Manoj Kurup, who told him that Project IC was also known as Project M - M standing for Mahathir.

"I never knew about Project IC until recently," Mahathir testified before the Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) on illegal immigrants in Sabah.

He claimed he was not bothered that his name had been used, saying his name was used everywhere and he had been called a racist and an ultra.

"I have never been bothered about these things," he said, adding that he had never given any instructions to former Sabah chief minister Tan Sri Harris Salleh or any individual with reference to the issuance of identity cards to illegal immigrants.

The Kota Kinabalu High Court today saw unprecedented levels of security and attendance since the RCI began, as word had spread about the RCI's 209th witness. Police screened the 140-plus people who entered the courtroom with a metal detector.

The proceedings began in an accommodating manner when RCI chairman Tan Sri Steve Shim Lip Kiong thanked Dr Mahathir for making time to testify.

Manoj began by asking Dr Mahathir whether he was aware of the influx of refugees from the Philippines into Malaysia between 1972 and 1984.

"It wasn't something new. It was going on prior to Sabah joining Malaysia.

"These people don't recognise borders, they come and go as they like, sometimes with the government's knowledge and sometimes without. These people who had been living in Sabah for a long time are acknowledged as Malaysian citizens," he said.

However, Dr Mahathir clarified that those who came to Malaysia from Indonesia and the Philippines couldn't be classified as refugees, clarifying that this was a term used for Rohingyas who had fled here from Myanmar.

Manoj then asked about the political parties in Sabah and what Dr Mahathir thought about Parti Bersatu Sabah. He asked the former premier whether there was any policy to defeat PBS at all costs after they had won in 1985 and 1986.

"PBS as the opposition is not something new to us. We have opposition parties ruling several states in the peninsular, including Kelantan and Terengganu, we have to defeat the opposition at all cost," Dr Mahathir told the RCI panel.

"The process of issuing identity cards to illegal immigrants was already going on before PBS came to power in the state. According to the Constitution, citizenship can be given to immigrants if they meet the requirements."

Dr Mahathir said there was no need for him to issue any instruction for illegal immigrants to be issued identity cards as it was done according to the laws already in place. No directions were necessary as it was a normal process.

Asked whether former Sabah Chief Minister Tun Mustapha Harun had sought his approval about issuing identity cards to illegal immigrants, Dr Mahathir said he did not remember giving any specific instructions but did advise him to follow the law.

He, however, said that often his instructions were misinterpreted by ministers and senior civil officers.

He said he often had meetings to clarify his instructions after post-Cabinet meetings to ensure his instructions were clear. - September 11, 2013.

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