

Dr M: I did not direct Tajuddin to buy MAS

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KUALA LUMPUR: Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has denied he had instructed former MAS chairman Tan Sri Tajuddin Ramli to buy shares in the national carrier to bail out Bank Negara.

"I don't remember instructing him to buy the shares."

He said it was former Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin who had told him that Tajuddin was interested in MAS shares.

"We were privatising everything at that time. When he wanted to buy the shares, we told him we wanted cash."

He said Tajuddin had earlier proposed to the Government to buy MAS shares through the exchange of Celcom and Naluri shares. Dr Mahathir said he did not agree with this proposal.

"I said if he had no money, we were not willing to sell him the shares," the former prime minister said, adding that Tajuddin borrowed RM1.8bil to pay for the MAS shares.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on Tajuddin's claim that he was asked by the Government to

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acquire a 32% stake in MAS in 1994.

Tajuddin had made this claim in his counter suit filed on June 29 against the Government and 24 other parties over his purchase of MAS shares.

This followed the suit by Pengurusan Danaharta Nasional Bhd and its subsidiaries, Danaharta Urus Sdn Bhd and Danaharta Managers Sdn Bhd, against Tajuddin, filed on May 11 seeking RM589mil as the balance of a RM1.79bil loan given to him in 1994 to buy MAS shares.

"I did not force him to buy MAS shares. I never asked him

to do national service," Dr Mahathir said after launching a book entitled *The Chinese Malaysian Contribution*, which featured the accounts of Chinese migrants in the then Malaya, and how they contributed to the building of the country.

Tajuddin had claimed that MAS shares were sold to him in the midst of Bank Negara losses in foreign exchange as a result of speculation in the international currency market.

Said Dr Mahathir: "At that time the Government was not short of money.

"We had the money in Bank Negara, and knew how to



Dr Mahathir: 'I never asked him to do national service'

recover the losses. We had RM50bil in our reserves then. We did not need his money."

He said he did not know how Tajuddin had concluded that he asked him to buy the shares.