

# It's purely a business deal, says soap tycoon

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KUALA LUMPUR: Soap-maker PAOS Holdings Bhd executive chairman Datuk Lim Tong Yong (pic), in the limelight after buying a healthcare firm from Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir, said yesterday the RM59.6mil deal was purely a business decision.

Lim said he had been surprised by the publicity generated by his purchase of a controlling 32.9% stake in Pantai Holdings from Mokhzani and insisted there was nothing unusual about it.

"There is nothing great about it," Lim said in his first statement to the media since the deal was announced on Thursday.

"I'm coming in purely as a businessman. I see this as a good business deal," said Lim, who controls PAOS Holdings Bhd. He said he was buying in his own personal capacity.

"This is a rare opportunity to get into the healthcare industry and I feel there is a lot of potential as the country grows and more and more people become health-conscious," he said.

The 51-year-old Lim, a college lecturer turned businessman, denied a suggestion that he was in Pantai for quick gains.

"We're coming into Pantai to grow the company. It's for long-term investment," he said.

Mokhzani said on Thursday he

had quit his businesses for now over charges involving government projects. He said he was disappointed by allegations made in Parliament tarnishing his name and that of his father, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Mahathir was quoted by newspapers yesterday as saying he did not instruct his son to withdraw from the corporate world, but had told him to refrain from involvement in business with links to the Government.

Mokhzani had sold his entire interest in diversified firm Tongkah Holdings Bhd.

Pantai and Tongkah have cross shareholdings. Tongkah this week sold a 12.3% equity interest in Pantai, reducing its stake in the healthcare group to 20.5%.

Pantai now owns 14.8% of Tongkah, having sold down from 16%.

Lim said he paid RM2.80 a share for 21.3 million shares of Pantai after months of "very tough" negotiations. The shares ended up at RM3.08 on Friday.

He said Pantai, which has six hospitals nationwide, would keep healthcare as its core business.

Lim declined to say how he funded the deal. But in February, Hap Seng Consolidated Bhd proposed to buy 25.13% of Lim's stake of more than 50% in PAOS.

"He has raised almost RM60mil. He's cash rich," an aide to the soap tycoon said. — Reuters