

Dr M: I told police I was not cheated in PKFZ case
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Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he had told the police that he was not cheated in connection with the cost of the controversial Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) project.

"As far as I can remember, no cabinet member objected to (the cost) of the project," Mahathir said in the High Court in Kuala Lumpur today..

Mahathir is the fourth defence witness in former transport minister Dr Ling Liong Sik's corruption trial.

He said one of the police officers who recorded his statement had remarked that if they had known that, they would not have charged Ling.

Mahathir said this in reply to questions from Ling's lawyer Wong Kian Kheong.

He said the police officers recorded his statement twice and he identified one of the officers as Supt R Rajagopal.

Wong: After perusing the documents given by the IO, did you inform the IO that you were cheated with regard to the land purchase?

Mahathir: No.

Wong: Did you lodge a police report that defendant cheated you with regard to the purchase of the land in this case?

Mahathir: No.

Wong: What did the IO tell you?

Mahathir: One of the officers said that if they had heard my statement, they would not have charged Dr Ling. However, I cannot remember which officer this is.

'Low land price will affect my popularity'

The former premier, who was also the Finance Minister and Special Functions Minister in 2002, also told the court that if compulsory acquisition was made on the 1,000 acre land in Pulau Indah, the price could be low.

He said as prime minister and Finance Minister, he did not want to acquire the land through compulsory acquisition as the evaluation done by his officers would be very low.

"The evaluation done by the officers would be low as they want to help the government to save money. Being a minister as well as a politician I know if (compulsory acquisition) is made, it would affect my popularity (being a politician). And popularity is very important to me.

"I do not want to undervalue the land (through compulsory acquisition) as my status (being the PM) depends on my popularity. If it is undervalued, people will be upset. If it is fair valued, it was alright for the government to acquire," he said.

Despite this, Mahathir said he remembered former Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Rais Yatim had warned him and the cabinet that there was problem in acquiring the land as there are encumbrances.

For him, he said he wanted to continue on with the PKFZ project as it is modelled after the Jebel Ali port in the Middle East of which he had visited twice, once during construction and another after it is completed.

Wong: Are you in favour of getting this land?

Mahathir: I remember that we wanted to get the land as the project is beneficial for the port and the country.

Wong: What were the reasons the cabinet decided to obtain the land?

Mahathir: We were concerned that this was a good project for the country and we wanted to go ahead with the project.

Wong: When you were the PM, did any of your ministers in the cabinet object to the project?

Mahathir: I do not remember any ministers voicing objection, as all of them backed the project.

RM25 did not include interest

Mahathir also told the court that none of his officers in the Finance Ministry had informed him of any discrepancy in the price of land when Ling had sent his letter dated June 29, 2002 to acquire the land in Pulau Indah for the project.

He said he cannot remember any of his officers or the cabinet having brought this to his attention.

When asked by Wong (left) whether he understood Ling's letter to him and its annexure, the former premier, who was wearing a khaki suit, replied he understood the letter and what Ling meant.

"My understanding at that time was RM25 per square foot (psf) of the land is for cash payment. If it is paid in cash, there will be no interest, if it is paid overtime there will be interest," he said.

Wong: Have you received any complaint from your officers and the cabinet that this letter (in contention) was misleading or contained any omission?

Mahathir: No

Wong: If it is paid over 15 years, there will be interest?

Mahathir: Yes it would

Wong: RM25, does it include interests?

Mahathir: No it cannot. I told the police officers who questioned me that the statement of price is cash price and if it is to be made over some time, there will be faedah (interest).

He agreed with Wong that until today, none of his former officers at the Finance Ministry or the cabinet had met him to say that they were cheated and he had not lodged any report over Ling's letter.

The hearing will continue tomorrow with Mahathir continuing his testimony before Justice Ahmadi Asnawi.

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