

Taib Mahmud denies cousins were his brokers
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Sarawak Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud has denied his cousins' claims that they were his intermediaries for logging contracts.

"Do you know that cousin? Did you find out what was the relationship between their father and me?"

"We were fighting at one time. That cousin cannot be my most trusted, but up to you," Abdul Taib (right) told reporters after attending a function at the Hilton Hotel, Kuching today.

He was responding to Global Witness' conversation with Norlia Abdul Rahman and Fatimah Abdul Rahman over a land deal that was caught on video.

The sisters are daughters of Abdul Rahman Ya'akub, the former chief minister who preceded Taib and is also Taib's uncle.

Blood thicker than water?

Global Witness, a London-based human rights NGO, had an investigator pose as an investor looking to buy land in Sarawak.

Norlia and Fatimah told the investigator that had bought 5,000 hectares state land, allegedly with Taib's help, at a nominal sum and wanted to sell the land for US\$16.6 million (RM52 million).

Global Witness claim that records show that the land lease was given by the state government in 2011 with a nominal premium of only US\$300,000, which means the sisters sought a hefty profit of US\$16.3 million or an investment return of over 5,400 percent in a period of just one year.

The duo, and four other sisters, are shareholders of a shell company holding the land. Their mother and Taib's father are siblings.

In the 1980s, Taib and Abdul Rahman (seated in photo) were engaged in a public feud which culminated in a rebellion among Taib's ranks which has been dubbed the Ming Court Affair.

In January 2008, the two figures publicly made up.

Taib: They are being naughty

A nonchalant looking Taib said that Global Witness was being "a bit naughty" in attempting

to use the video to tarnish his name.

"I saw the so-called proof. Could it not be someone try to promote themselves to become an agent to get favours from me?"

"It has nothing to do with me right?"

"You look at that. I think it is a bit naughty of them to use their big power to blacken my name."

"Okay. If that is what they want to do it only reflects their credibility," he said, while also brushing off suggestions that he will respond to Global Witness.

Taib said that back in the 1980s when he was in charge of the state' forestry, he had made a public statement that he won't accept intermediaries when it came to logging contracts.

"I said nobody is my intermediary because I don't believe in deals. Everything got to be done according to government procedure," he said.

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