

**PKFZ scandal: Ex-transport minister Ling charged**  
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Former transport minister Ling Liong Sik was today charged in the Putrajaya Sessions Court over his involvement in the multi-billion ringgit Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) scandal.

azlanLing, 67, also a former MCA president, is by far the most prominent politician to be nabbed in recent years.

He is charged under Section 418 of the Penal Code with misleading the cabinet between Sept 25 and Nov 6, 2002, into agreeing to purchase 999.5 acres of land on Pulau Indah for a project, now known as PKFZ, at a price of RM25psf on a deferred payment basis for a 15-year period, at a 7.5 percent interest rate.

The cumulative interest paid would total RM720 million at the end of the repayment period.

He was also offered an alternative charge, under Section 417 of the Penal Code, for the same offence.

According to the charge sheet, the Finance Ministry had already valued the land at RM25psf - inclusive of compounded interest - and this fact was withheld from the cabinet by the accused.

Ling pleaded not guilty to both charges and Sessions Court judge Suzana Hussin set bail at RM1 million. Mention has been fixed for Sept 3.

NONEAccording to a source, Ling managed to post bail today.

He was represented by counsel RR Sethu.

It is learnt that the charge came as a shock to Ling, who did not know what was in store until noon today.

His family is said to be devastated by the news of the arrest.

On leaving the courtroom, Ling gave a stiff smile and told journalists that it was his first time to Putrajaya's Palace of Justice, located next to the Sessions Court complex.

Asked whether he was confident about fighting off the case, he said, "In the Palace of Justice, you must feel very confident of justice."

Ling appeared in court at 4.45pm, accompanied by his wife Ena and two sons. He then proceeded to sit in the dock. Ling, who wore a light-blue striped shirt and a pair of sandals, was expressionless.

He is the first Malaysian with the royal honorific 'Tun' and the second MCA president after Tan Koon Swan to be put in the dock.

NONEEarlier today, rumours of a very important personality (VIP) to be charged sent dozens of journalists, including those from foreign wire services, camping at the court complex from morning.

Most of them gathered at the lobby and main entrance to the courthouse, while a few stationed themselves in and outside the courtroom.

About 4pm, after journalists had been waiting for eight hours, attorney-general Abdul Gani Patail and three DPPs, including head of prosecution Tun Abdul Majid Tun Hamzah, arrived in court but did not speak to the journalists. The other two were Manoj Kurup and Dzulkipli Ahmad.

More to come?

Last November, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) had recommended in its report on the PKFZ controversy that former transport minister Chan Kong Choy and former Port Klang Authority (PKA) general manager OC Phang be probed for criminal breach of trust.

NONETHis was over the wrongful issuance of three letters of support by Chan and three letters of undertaking by Phang without Finance Ministry approval.

PAC said that it was informed by the attorney-general that the letters were implicitly a form of guarantee from the government to ensure that there would be allocations for PKA to enable it to meet its obligations under the development agreement.

PKFZ, a commercial and industrial project south of the capital, was conceived as a RM1.82 billion venture constructed over 1,000 acres.

However, costs are now expected to balloon to RM12.5 billion, making the affair one of the country's biggest financial scandals and a major embarrassment for the government.

port klang free zone 070607 signboardInvestigations into the project's financial records since then have revealed instances of corruption, cases of conflict of interest as well as breach of trust.

Ling is one of the very rare top politicians in Malaysia to be charged with corruption.

In 2004, former land and cooperative development minister Kasitah Gaddam was charged in the Sessions Court with corrupt practice and cheating, the first cabinet member to be charged with such crimes. He was freed by the court last year, without his defence being called.

Before Kasitah, former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim, who is now opposition leader, was the other prominent politician charged with corruption. He was sentenced to a six-year jail term in 1999.

Another top politician who was charged with corruption was the late Harun Idris, the Selangor menteri besar from 1964 to 1976.

He was slapped with a six-year jail sentence but served three years behind bars before being pardoned by the King in 1981 on the advice of the then new prime minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

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