

Koh urged to admit guilt over land scam
Malaysiakini.com
Jul 29, 2008
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Gerakan acting president Koh Tsu Koon should act like a gentleman and show courage in accepting blame for land scams that occurred in Penang during his 18 year tenure as chief minister.
MCPX

penang land scam 290708 lim guan engChief Minister Lim Guan Eng said his predecessor should emulate the example set by his former deputy by publicly admitting that he was responsible for land scams that have cost the state millions of ringgit.

"We could have used the money lost in land scams to develop top-class Wifi hotspots for Internet and other telecommunications throughout the state.

"Koh should be man enough to admit that he made blunders in land deals that cost the state government millions," Lim told journalists after launching the Penang Radio Frequency Cluster at the Penang Skills Development Centre in Bayan Lepas.

At the state assembly sitting yesterday, former deputy Chief Minister Dr Hilmi Yahaya, now Teluk Bahang assemblyperson, took the blame for a land blunder that would cost the state government some RM40 million following an out of court settlement.

Malaysiakini reported last week that the three-member investigating team, led by deputy Chief Minister I Mohammad Fairus Khairuddin, uncovered irregularities in the allocation of a 4.24ha piece of land to a private contractor for quarrying activities in the Seberang Perai Tengah district about six years ago.

The state land committee, then headed by Hilmi, had erred by approving the application when the land was under a state lease awarded to another company.

The slip-up prompted the lease-holder to initiate legal proceedings against the Penang government.

At one stage, during the out of court negotiations, the claimant is believed to have accepted a RM1.8 million compensation deal but Koh's administration apparently did not agree.

Finally on appeal, the court ordered the state to pay RM29 million plus interests of eight percent per annum, which could cost the state government some RM40 million.

DAP 'right all along'

When contacted today, Hilmi denied any wrongdoing on his part, clarifying that he had apologised for the fiasco and not for his role, if any.

During Lim's winding-up speech at the sitting yesterday, Hilmi stood up and admitted to being guilty, prompting the Chief Minister to describe it as a coup for his 'CAT' government which emphasises competency, accountability and transparency.

However at a press conference today, Hilmi put the blame on officials handling the case, saying they were responsible for the blunder in the land case.

Mohammad Fairus' committee was set up to investigate dubious land deals that allegedly took place between 1990 and 2008, after the DAP-led state government discovered that millions of ringgit had been siphoned off under Barisan Nasional rule.

Others in the committee are Deputy Chief Minister II Prof Dr P Ramasamy and state executive councillor Phee Boon Poh.

Even though Lim has frequently called on Koh to discuss the contentious issue of land scams, the former chief minister has remained tight-lipped.

But Lim, not letting an opportunity to criticise Koh slip by, called on him "to come out from his shell and own up for his administrative blunder".

He said land scams confirmed DAP's suspicions that "corruption, scandals and misappropriation of public funds were part and parcel of BN administration".

"We were right all along," said the DAP secretary-general and Bagan member of Parliament.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/86942>