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# 'Ling didn't make changes'

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## Dr M: No evidence former minister altered documents

**KUALA LUMPUR:** There is no evidence that former Transport Minister Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik cheated the Cabinet in the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) project, the High Court was told.

Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said there was also no evidence that Dr Ling had instructed his officers to make changes in the Cabinet papers or altered the documentation prepared by his officers over the land purchase.

"There is no evidence in this case that the minister made changes or alterations."

After Dr Mahathir took oath at 9.30am, he asked trial judge Ahmadi Asnawi permission to explain the workings of the Cabinet as he found that the line of questioning by the DPP showed a lack of understanding of Cabinet procedures.

However, lead prosecutor Datuk Tun Abdul Majid Tun Hamzah immediately objected, prompting the court to stand down for 10 minutes.

It was only during re-examination by defence counsel Wong Kian Kheong that Dr Mahathir had the opportunity to explain.

"The minister does not prepare Cabinet papers. These are prepared by the officer based on the information they have. The minister may sign it or alter or change it, in which case he has to go back to the KSU (secretary-general).

"It is then up to the KSU whether to accept. If the KSU feels that it is

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- TUN DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

detrimental to the country, then it is the KSU's duty to point it out to the minister.

"If the minister still insists, then the KSU should consult the experts or report it to the KSN (Chief Secretary to the Government). The KSN sits in Cabinet and has direct access to me anytime," he said.

Dr Mahathir explained that if the minister had wanted or instructed to change the paper, there would be proof, adding that at no point was it ever reported to him that the Transport Minister was doing such a thing.

"If the minister made no alterations, then if anything is detrimental, it must have come from the officers as he (the minister) was not at the meetings.

"Cabinet then considers these papers knowing that the details come from the officers and the minister signs in good faith.

"It also happened to me when I was Finance Minister," said Dr Mahathir, adding that he never rejected any paper prepared by his officers.

"To say that the minister cheated the Government (would) imply that the people preparing the papers were also colluding with him to cheat. There is no evidence of cheating," he said.

All the papers, he added, were prepared by the ministry's senior officials, vetted by its secretary-general and examined by its experts before being presented to the minister.

Asked by the defence counsel if the "Chief Secretary ever alerted him that Dr Ling had asked the ministry's secretary-general to prepare papers contrary to the country's interests", Dr Mahathir replied: "No, I don't remember. I would certainly remember it (if there is such an occasion)."

Neither the Chief Secretary nor the other ministers had also ever complained to him about Dr Ling, he said, adding that "he was never deceived, misled or cheated by the accused".

Reiterating that the Cabinet had the final say over the PKFZ project, he said it made the final decision on the land price, interest rate as well as the duration of payment.

Questioned by Wong, Dr Mahathir said no Cabinet minister had expressed a dissenting opinion over the project and neither was the Cabinet

bound by the Valuation and Property Services Department's (JPPH) report.

"(Although) we take into consideration (the report), we are not bound by it. The Cabinet has the right to make its own decision based on the advice coming in. It may even reject all the opinions if it thinks fit," he said.

To a question by Tun Abdul Majid that RM1.088bil at RM25 psf was the final price for the purchase of the PKFZ land, he disagreed.

"If you pay cash, there is no necessity to pay interest. But if one is paying over a 15-year period, calculations must be made (to pay additional interest on top of the RM25 psf for the land purchase)," he said.

"The RM25 psf cannot be inclusive of interest nor the RM1.088bil be inclusive of the interest rate."

When Tun Majid put to him that the RM1.088bil or RM25 psf had already taken into account interest, Dr Mahathir asked him to point out where it said so.

Shown the JPPH valuation letter, Dr M again asked to be specifically shown where in the letter it was stated so.

Tun Majid then read out the last paragraph of the letter, to which Dr M replied, "It does not say anywhere here that RM25 psf included interest, that's what I am asking."

"Where does it say that RM25 psf includes interest?" he said, after which Tun Majid ended his cross-examination.