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Dr M: I never felt misled by Ling

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> Papers to cabinet prepared by officers of sec-gen, ex-PM testifies

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KUALA LUMPUR: Former transport minister Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik would have had to collude with his senior officers if he had wanted to cheat the cabinet over the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) land deal, the High Court yesterday heard.

Testifying for the defence at Ling's trial for cheating, former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said papers prepared for the cabinet from the ministry were never prepared by the minister,

although the minister may ask for changes or corrections to be made.

"Papers (to the cabinet) are prepared by the officers including the secretary-general. They prepare it based on information they have, before submitting it to the minister, who will sign it if he is happy," he said when questioned by defence counsel Wong Kian Kheong.

Mahathir said any changes the minister wished to make must be accepted by the secretary-general, and if the changes were detrimental to the government, the secretary-general had a duty to point out the error.

"The sec-gen ... can refer to chief secretary, who sits in at the cabinet meeting and has access to me any time. He (the chief secretary) would have reported any irregularities to me that the minister has suggested something bad to the government, and that the interests of the minister are contrary to that of the government - such as suggesting higher prices than what was negotiated.

"To say the minister (Ling) is trying to cheat the cabinet implies that those who prepared the paper are colluding with him," he added.

He reiterated that at no time did he receive a complaint from the chief secretary with regard to detrimental changes to letters by Ling, nor did he feel misled or cheated by Ling in the PKFZ land deal.

Ling, 67, who is also former MCA president, is charged under Sections 417 and 418 of the Penal Code for concealing facts about an additional 7.5% interest, and for deceiving the cabinet into believing the land in Pulau Indah was priced at RM25 psf when he knew the actual land price was RM21 psf "special value".

The hearing before Justice Datuk Ahmadi Asnawi resumes on March 12.

