

'RM2mil meant for Najib'

Witness: Payment was for Zarul to get closer to former PM

KUALA LUMPUR: A former company senior executive director said a RM2mil payment linked to the Penang undersea tunnel was meant for former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

Consortium Zenith Beijing Urban Construction Group Sdn Bhd (CZBUCG) former senior executive director Ibrahim Sahari told the Sessions Court hearing the corruption trial of former Penang chief minister Lim Guan Eng that the sum was meant to help his former superior Datuk Zarul Ahmad Mohd Zulkifli, the owner of CZBUCG, to get closer to Najib and to get future projects.

During the cross-examination by lead counsel Gobind Singh Deo, Ibrahim, the 29th prosecution witness who is recalled to the stand, confirmed that the RM2mil was part of the RM19mil involved in a previous cheating case involving Zarul Ahmad and a businessman, G. Gnanaraja, in the Shah Alam Sessions Court in 2019.

Gobind: In your evidence in Shah Alam (court), you mentioned a request from Gnanaraja for a big sum of money from Zarul Ahmad, correct?

Ibrahim: Yes.

Gobind: How much did Gnanaraja ask for in total?

Ibrahim: RM19mil.

Gobind: He stated that the money was for a certain purpose?

Ibrahim: Yes.

Gobind: And you got it that the purpose was to strengthen the relationship with the PM and to get future projects?

Ibrahim: Yes.

Gobind: Who was the PM?

Ibrahim: Former prime minister Najib.

In the Shah Alam case, Gnanaraja was charged with cheating Zarul Ahmad of RM19mil as an inducement to help the latter drop certain money laundering charges.

However, Gnanaraja pleaded guilty to an alternative charge under the Companies Act in December 2020 and was fined RM230,000.

The cheating case has since been classified as "no further action (NFA)".

Gobind contended that Ibrahim, together with a few other prosecution witnesses had lied as they gave different testimonies during the Shah Alam case.

The contention was about who was the recipient of the RM2mil, which was issued and cashed using the same payment voucher and cheque, as shown in the forensic report from the Shah Alam court, showing that there were two different versions of the statements in the two courts.

Zarul Ahmad had earlier testified that the RM2mil was meant for Lim as a bribe after his company got the tender for the undersea tunnel project.

Ibrahim also agreed with Gobind that it was "impossible" that the RM2mil was meant for Lim, due to the nature of Gnanaraja's demand.

He also agreed that Zarul Ahmad was under pressure from Gnanaraja, who had been pressing Zarul Ahmad to hand over the RM19mil.

Gobind: It's impossible that it

(the money) was given to anyone else, because of the nature of the demand.

Ibrahim: Agree.

Gobind: I put it to you that it was impossible that the RM2mil was paid to Lim Guan Eng. Gnanaraja wanted RM19mil, why would RM2mil be paid to someone else?

Ibrahim: Correct.

This prompted deputy public prosecutor Ahmad Akram Gharib to raise an objection, saying how could the witness give an answer on behalf of someone else.

However, judge Azura Alwi allowed Gobind's question and Ibrahim's answer to stand.

Ibrahim also confirmed that after Zarul Ahmad realised that he had been cheated by Gnanaraja, he called for a company directors' meeting before issuing a letter of demand to Gnanaraja to retrieve the RM19mil.

He said the meeting and the court summons had nothing to do with Lim.

However, when asked if the details of the RM2mil and the Shah Alam case were important evidence for Lim's case, Ibrahim said he was not sure.

When grilled further, Ibrahim said that his action of not informing the court of the Shah Alam case was because he was not sure it was important.

"I'm not well-versed with the laws and evidence. I wasn't sure that the information, must be revealed in the Kuala Lumpur court."

When asked, Ibrahim also agreed that since the DPP was the

one who attended both courts and handled the cases, the person should be the one to inform the court.

Gobind: But they all kept quiet.

Ibrahim: I can't comment.

Gobind: In our language, it's called the suppression of evidence.

Ibrahim: I'm sorry, I don't understand.

Gobind: That's the question. You sit there and you don't care. That is suppression, yes?

Ibrahim: I didn't know it was suppression.

The trial resumes on Aug 7.

Lim, 62, is facing an amended charge of using his position as then Penang chief minister to solicit RM3.3mil in bribes as an inducement to assist Zarul Ahmad to secure the undersea tunnel project worth RM6,341,383,702.

Lim allegedly committed the offence at the Penang Chief Minister's Office, Level 28, Komtar, George Town, between January 2011 and August 2017.

In the second amended charge, Lim is accused of soliciting a bribe of 10% of the profit from the company as gratification to secure the project.

The offence was allegedly committed near The Gardens Hotel, Lingkaran Syed Putra, Mid Valley City here in March 2011.

Lim, who is former DAP secretary-general, faces two further charges of causing two plots of land worth RM208.8mil, belonging to the Penang government, to be disposed of to two companies linked to the state's undersea tunnel project.