

'Big boss' not exclusive to Najib

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pg. 9

Witness tells court the label was used for several people including Lim

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KUALA LUMPUR: A key prosecution witness in the corruption trial involving Lim Guan Eng told the Sessions Court that the term "big boss", who appeared to be the recipient of a RM2mil bribe, was given to more than one person.

Consortium Zenith Construction Sdn Bhd executive director Datuk Zarul Ahmad Mohd Zulkifli said the term could refer to Lim as well as former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak in different parts of a WhatsApp message exchange between him and businessman G. Gnanaraja.

"I use the reference on other people also," he testified during an impeachment hearing as part of the ongoing trial involving Lim in the Penang undersea tunnel and road project.

Lim's lead counsel, Haijan Omar, had referred Zarul Ahmad to his WhatsApp message exchange with Gnanaraja on Aug 17, 2017, whereby the 23rd prosecution witness disagreed that "big boss" was exclusively referring to Najib.

Haijan: So RM2mil was given to Gnanaraja... and you referred to the money as 'chocolate'.

Zarul Ahmad: Yes.

Haijan: And the chocolate was meant for 'big boss'?

Zarul Ahmad: Yes.

Haijan: I suggest to you that the 'chocolate' was only referring to RM2mil.

Zarul Ahmad: I disagree.

Haijan: Because the 'chocolate' was specially meant for 'big boss'.

Zarul Ahmad: I disagree.

Haijan: And the 'big boss' was not Lim Guan Eng.

Zarul Ahmad: I disagree.

Haijan: I suggest to you that 'big boss' was Najib, the prime minister of that time.

Zarul Ahmad: I disagree.

Last October, Zarul Ahmad dropped a bombshell and testified that RM4mil was actually to be given to Gnanaraja, of which RM2mil was withdrawn from his company account to be given to Najib, while the other RM2mil was taken out of his safe to be given to Lim.

He said the money given to Najib was to obtain the former prime minister's help to stop the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) from investigating his company and also to strengthen his ties with Najib for future projects.

He also said the RM2mil, termed "chocolate" for Lim, was part of the bribe for the former chief minister for giving the project to

his company.

The impeachment proceeding began after judge Azura Alwi granted the defence's request on Jan 9, following Zarul Ahmad's conflicting MACC statements in this court and in a previous Shah Alam case involving Gnanaraja.

Zarul Ahmad's statement had been produced in a separate trial in Shah Alam in 2019, where Gnanaraja was charged with cheating him of RM19mil as an inducement to help drop money laundering charges against the latter.

However, Gnanaraja pleaded guilty to an alternative charge under the Companies Act in December 2020 and was fined RM230,000, while the cheating case has since been classified as "no further action" (NFA).

Zarul Ahmad had earlier told the court that RM2mil was given to Lim in a cash cheque for the undersea tunnel and road project, while another RM2mil in cash had been given to Gnanaraja for it to be delivered to Najib.

The defence team had disputed this claim, noting that Zarul Ahmad had previously stated in the Shah Alam Sessions Court that the RM2mil was only meant for Najib.

According to the prosecution, Zarul Ahmad later "rectified" his

statement to MACC in connection with the Shah Alam case.

In his testimony, Zarul Ahmad responded to a question by Lim's counsel, RSN Rayer, saying that the "big boss" referred to Najib in part of his message exchange with Gnanaraja on July 23, 2017.

Rayer: The gist from Gnanaraja's conversation was that he celebrated the 'big boss' birthday on July 23, 2017 (and) that he will meet with the 'big boss' at Taman Duta? Ahmad Zarul: Yes.

Rayer: And when asked during the main trial earlier, you admitted that 'big boss' referred to Najib, as his birthday was July 23, and he lived in Taman Duta?

Ahmad Zarul: Yes.

Rayer: So 'big boss' referred to Najib?

Ahmad Zarul: In this context, yes.

Rayer: Throughout this WhatsApp conversation, there was only a reference to one 'big boss', correct?

Ahmad Zarul: No.

Rayer: There was only one 'big boss'.

Ahmad Zarul: No, I disagree.

Rayer: Why?

Ahmad Zarul: I use the reference to other people also.

Zarul Ahmad earlier expressed his displeasure that despite testifying for more than a year, the

same questions kept coming up.

"It's already been more than a year. I am trying to tell the truth, and I have been giving the same answers.

"The cross-examination over my impeachment is testing the threshold of my patience. Also, I am not well," he said, referring to his pancreatic cancer.

He added that he didn't care about the outcome of this trial and that he had already addressed the questions during cross-examination.

However, Azura advised Zarul Ahmad to be patient and to answer the questions wherever relevant.

Deputy public prosecutor Datuk Wan Shaharuddin Wan Ladin also objected to the defence's repeated questions for Zarul Ahmad.

"The questions today (Monday) are similar to those asked by the defence during the main trial.

"They should be different from the impeachment proceedings and focus on where inconsistencies were raised," he said, adding that the defence's repeated questioning would only delay the trial.

Azura also agreed that the defence had repeated questions and reminded them to be focused on the on the next proceeding.

The trial resumes today.