

Dr Ling signed but didn't write letter to PM, witness reveals
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 14 — At Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik's cheating trial today, the spotlight fell on a three-page letter he signed and sent to the then prime minister in 2002 that appeared to set the outcome of the now scandal-tainted Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) project.

A former senior transport ministry official revealed today that Dr Ling, then the minister in charge of the port project, had played no part in writing or even drafting the letter, which had been heavily revised on certain facts that are now being disputed.

Datuk Zaharaah Shaari, who was the Ministry of Transport's (MoT) secretary-general at that time and was tasked with preparing the letter, told the High Court her ex-boss had read the letter dated April 3, 2002 to which he affixed his signature, but "was not involved" in writing or drafting its contents.

She admitted, after persistent questioning by Dr Ling's lawyer, Wong Kian Kheong, that she had made several "corrections" to an original draft by former Port Klang Authority (PKA) chief Datin O.C. Phang.

"The biggest amendment I remember was to paragraph five," she told the High Court, referring to a lengthy explanation over the problem of obtaining the required 1,000 acres of land from Pulau Indah landowner Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd (KDSB) for the project that was to turn Port Klang into a mega distribution hub.

Then Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, was asked to "reconsider a proposal for direct purchase from KDSB" after the land price was renegotiated.

Zaharaah said she had amended Phang's draft to "correct" the land acquisition issue over the land price of RM25 per square foot (psf) as calculated by the government's Valuation and Property Services Department (JPPH), which she insisted included the overall development cost and interest, and amounted to RM1.088 billion payable over a 10-year period with payment for the first two years suspended.

Wong, however, contested this particular point.

Dr Ling's lead defence counsel contended that Zaharaah's argument did not hold water and that she was in fact, very much aware of it.

He brought the court's attention to the Treasury's then secretary-general, Datuk Samsuddin Hitam's letter to Zaharaah dating back a whole year earlier to February 24, 2001, which highlighted that the RM25 psf price tag on the land was not inclusive of interest, as claimed.

Then Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, was asked to "reconsider a proposal for direct purchase from KDSB" after the land price was renegotiated.

Dr Ling is accused of duping the Malaysian government into embarking on the PKFZ project and triggering a costly financial mess, by double-billing the Cabinet.

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