

Pua wants 'incompetent' Kong axed from Cabinet
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, March 22 — DAP lawmaker Tony Pua wants Datuk Seri Kong Cho Ha rebuked or removed from the Cabinet, accusing him today of being an incompetent transport minister.

The minister's inability to address allegations of cost overruns in the construction of KLIA2, Pua said in a statement here, proves his "sheer incompetence and absolute lack of accountability" in ensuring that public monies are well spent.

"How can a minister plead ignorance over a RM3.9 billion scandal right under his nose?" he asked.

Pua pointed out that Kong's ministry is fully represented in the Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd (MAHB) board of directors and should, therefore, be aware of details behind the airport's cost increase.

He highlighted Kong's inability to answer his queries regarding the controversy, particularly on why MAHB had been allowed to shift the airport from KLIA North to KLIA West, resulting in the massive cost overrun.

But Kong's only explanation yesterday, Pua reminded, was merely that the shift was "based on KLIA Blueprint December 2008".

In a separate statement yesterday, Pua had lashed out again at Kong for his vague response and alleged that "there is something to hide".

According to the Petaling Jaya Utara MP, the cost of the new KLIA2 "low-cost" airport terminal had increased from an initial RM1.7 billion budget to RM3.9 billion.

The additional expenses, Pua had earlier alleged, were caused by the shift as KLIA West was already as unsuitable for the construction of an airport due to it being a peat swamp.

The Transport Ministry had said yesterday about RM773 million would be spent for earthworks, but Pua claimed here that the sum is believed to be higher.

In the verbal exchanges between the duo, Kong was reported yesterday as accusing Pua of "playing politics" (Bernama).

Kong also reportedly told Pua to direct his questions to MAHB instead, adding that he was neither an engineer nor a consultant for the project.

"His (Kong) response has proven his sheer incompetence and absolute lack of accountability in ensuring that public interest directly under his purview is fully protected," Pua said.

"The prime minister, Datuk Seri Najib Razak, must immediately admonish his transport minister for completely lacking the necessary 'people first, performance now' attributes and demand that Kong be accountable to his ministry's duties, or he should be removed from his position," he added.

In February, Pua slammed MAHB managing director Tan Sri Bashir Ahmad for saying late last year that public funds would not be used to fund the additional cost of KLIA2.

Pua, who is also DAP publicity chief, pointed out that despite the earlier denial, MAHB said it will raise approximately RM598 million from a proposed share placement exercise.

"The action by MAHB to raise additional funds from the market proves that public financial interest has been compromised as a result of the RM2.2 billion increase in cost of KLIA2.

"Existing major shareholders of MAHB which act indirectly as trustees to government and public funds are forced to dilute their shareholding by 10 per cent as a result of the exercise," he said, adding MAHB had also raised a debt of RM3.1 billion in 2010. Kong, however, said in January that his ministry was not involved in the decision to shift sites as it was decided by MAHB alone.

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