

Only 'tip of iceberg' so far, ex-PKA boss says of PKFZ scandal
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, April 13 — Despite five years of exposés on the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) scandal that could cost taxpayers up to RM12.5 billion, the ex-chairman of the Port Klang Authority (PKA) says authorities have only hit the “tip of the iceberg”.

Datuk Lee Hwa Beng also suggested that only political change could result in independent investigations unhindered by vested interests.

The book will be launched on Tuesday and available in bookstores soon after. He said earlier this week that there were many questions on the project that were still unanswered, during an interview ahead of next Tuesday’s release of his book, “PKFZ: A Nation’s Trust Betrayed”, which chronicles the story of the project first mooted in 1997 and included insights from his three years as PKA boss when the controversy erupted, as well as his role in the investigations.

The book, co-written by Lee with former journalist Lee Siew Lian, is being published by The Malaysian Insider and is expected to be available in major bookshops soon after next Tuesday’s launch.

“Outside of PKA, a lot of things happened. It might come out in the court cases. OC Phang’s trial will probably reveal even more facts,” Lee said of the former PKA general manager who served from 1997 to 2008, when the cost of the project ballooned from RM1.1 billion to RM4.6 billion.

She is currently on trial for three counts of criminal breach of trust involving over RM254 million related to the PKFZ.

“In the transport ministry, there are so many things that happened, which we won’t know about, that might not be revealed in the court cases. Only the police and Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) have the power to dig (these) out.

“The six that are on trial were not charged with corruption. Without that, the money trail won’t come out,” he said, referring to the prosecution of the half dozen individuals including two former transport ministers.

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The former Subang Jaya assemblyman for MCA added that political change was needed so that port officials will not be obstructed by those with vested interests.

“This is not the end of the story, there is more to be unravelled and unearthed. It is just the tip of the iceberg,” he said in a recent interview with The Malaysian Insider.

The project, initially estimated at RM1.1 billion after it was mooted by then transport

minister Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik in 1997, more than quadrupled in cost to RM4.6 billion by 2007.

A position review by top accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) revealed in 2009 that the total cost including interests from debt repayments could reach RM12.5 billion.

Since December 2009, six individuals have been charged in court including ex-MCA president Dr Ling, and his successor as transport minister, former MCA deputy chief Tan Sri Chan Kong Choy. Both are accused of lying to the Cabinet.

The PKFZ has slipped out of the limelight since the trials began and following Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat's removal as MCA president and transport minister in 2010.

Lee co-wrote the book with former journalist Lee Siew Lian (left).

But the Pandan MP, who had ordered several probes and committees into the scandal when he was in Cabinet, threatened in February to reveal even more names implicated in the controversy.

"This (ongoing events) is nothing compared to what was mentioned in the thick and heavy volumes of reports lodged with police, MACC and the Prime Minister's Department, which (Bar Council president Lim) Chee Wee is also aware of.

"What's happening right now (in the court proceedings) is not even the curtain raiser. It has not even begun yet!" he said.

Lee also said that there were various civil suits that would uncover more details on the involvement of major players in the scandal — including Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd (KDSB), the turnkey developer of the project.

The company owned by Bintulu MP Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing was a key player from the start, selling the 1,000-acre plot to the government in 2002 for RM1.8 billion, inclusive of interest, after earlier purchasing it for RM96 million.

Lee, who was PKA chief from March 2008 to March 2011, is being sued by Tiong, who is Barisan Nasional Backbenchers chief, as well as KDSB. He has in turn launched legal action on behalf of PKA against Tiong and OC Phang.

Others such as former MCA chief Ong and PwC are also involved in civil suits in relation to the PKFZ.

"When you write a book of such nature, you must prepare for any eventuality. In most cases, truth hurts," he said, when asked if he expects to be sued further after the release of his 218-page tome.

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