

DAP says Dr M allowed 'rape' of taxpayers in MEX deal
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, April 18 — The DAP accused Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today of hypocrisy in his criticism of Tan Sri Abu Sahid Mohamed's RM1.7 billion sale of Maju Expressway (MEX) when it was the former prime minister who allowed the "rape of Malaysian taxpayers" by awarding the lopsided deal.

Publicity chief Tony Pua said the concession agreement was awarded "on a silver platter" to Abu Sahid in 1997 and revised in 2003 just prior to Dr Mahathir's retirement.

Tony Pua said today Dr Mahathir's recent comments "smack of hypocrisy and false righteousness". — file pic

"The rape of Malaysian taxpayers which made a billionaire out of Abu Sahid... is simply outrageous and unacceptable because out of his 'profit', RM976.7 million was paid for by Malaysian taxpayers," he said, referring to the grant which was worth 74 per cent of the RM1.32 billion construction cost.

Dr Mahathir, who was PM from 1981 to 2003, said on Monday the MEX sale appears to be an exercise in making money out of government assistance and that Abu Sahid should explain himself to the public.

His comment comes after last month's RM1.7 billion sale raised questions over the fairness of the deal as Abu Sahid's Maju Holdings Sdn Bhd could walk away with an estimated return of between RM660 million and RM1 billion after just four years of operations.

"You sell what is yours, you don't sell what belongs to others. It could be as bad as selling APs," Dr Mahathir told reporters, referring to the frowned upon practice of well-connected Bumiputera businessmen making quick profits from nothing more than the sale of import licences granted by the government.

But Pua said today Dr Mahathir's comments "smack of hypocrisy and false righteousness" as it was the former Umno president who made the decision to offer the RM976.7 million grant instead of a loan, allowing Abu Sahid to cash out quickly.

The Petaling Jaya Utara MP added that the lopsided concession would also have allowed Abu Sahid's Maju Holdings to collect more than RM7.6 billion in toll revenue up to 2037, "making a ridiculous amount of profit in return for his tiny RM60 million investment."

"Hence whether Abu Sahid sells his concession today to realise RM1.09 billion in profits or to keep it over the next 25 years and realise even more profit is moot. The issue is simply, the Barisan Nasional government has chosen to award outrageously lucrative concession contracts to its cronies," he said.

EP Manufacturing Berhad had last month entered into an acquisition agreement with Maju Holdings to acquire the MEX for RM1.15 billion and also assume debts totalling RM550

million, valuing the deal at a total cost of RM1.7 billion.

The MEX is 96.8 per cent owned by Maju Holdings in which Abu Sahid holds a 91 per cent stake and is the concession holder of the 26km-long link between Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya and Cyberjaya.

The highway was completed in December 2007 and started operations the following January.

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