

Liong Sik: Letter to Dr M contained 'lies'
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, July 16 — Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik revealed today that he had unknowingly signed a letter containing “lies” to former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 2002 regarding the government’s purchase of land for the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) project.

But the former transport minister, while defending himself from the witness stand today, said he had been shocked upon discovering the “lies” and insisted that he neither prepared the letter nor was aware that it contained misleading information.

“I would have either corrected it or not sent it out,” he told the court during the examination-in-chief by his lawyer Wong Kian Kheong this afternoon.

According to the letter, read out by Wong to the court today, Dr Ling had written to inform the then-PM, Dr Mahathir, that Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd (KDSB), the turnkey developer for PKFZ, had agreed to sell 999.5 acres of land on a “willing buyer, willing seller” basis for RM25 psf and 7.5 per cent interest or a total rate of RM1.088 billion for the multibillion ringgit project.

In the letter signed by Dr Ling on June 29, 2002, it was said that this agreement with KDSB would bring “benefits and profits” to the government.

But Dr Ling said those words were “lies” as, according to the minutes of KDSB’s meeting with officials from his ministry on April 17 the same year, the negotiation had not gone as well as claimed.

He pointed out that he had not attended the April meeting, adding that if he had, he would not have sent out such a letter to Dr Mahathir.

“I would say this is a shocking letter... because in this (the meeting minutes), the meeting never even took off. They were accusing each other of corruption.

“How could I then tell the PM that this (negotiation) would [bring] benefits (to the government)? Based on the minutes, this letter becomes a lie,” a frustrated-looking Dr Ling told the High Court.

“I don’t have that kind of audacity to tell the PM a lie, in the face of this revelation,” he said, again referring to the meeting minutes.

Wong then pointed out to the courtroom that among those from the Transport Ministry who had attended the April meeting with KDSB were then ministry secretary-general Datuk Zaharaah Shaari, ministry deputy secretary-general (planning) Datuk Abdul Rahman Mohd Noor, and then principal assistant secretary in the maritime division in charge of sea ports P. Chandrasekaran.

All three individuals had testified last year as the prosecution’s witnesses.

“Were they among the officials who prepared P24 (the letter to Dr Mahathir) and the two annexures?” Wong asked.

"I should think so, because they were the senior officers attached to this project for a long time," Dr Ling answered, adding that until today, none of the officials has informed him that the letter had contained misleading information.

"When you signed P24 and sent it to the PM, did you have any intention to cheat, deceive or mislead the PM," Wong continued.

Visibly taken aback, Dr Ling replied, "Obviously not."

"In the first place, for me to write this letter in the light of any possibility of that meeting on April 17 being found out, would be disastrous... because here I am describing how it would bring benefit and that is an absolute lie," he said.

The former MCA president is facing the possibility of a seven-year jail term, or fine, or both, for allegedly deceiving the Cabinet into approving the purchase of 999.5 acres of land for the PKFZ project, which had resulted in wrongful losses for the government.

He also faces two alternative charges of deceiving the Cabinet into believing that the terms of purchase — at RM25 psf plus 7.5 per cent interest — were acknowledged and agreed to by the Valuation and Property Services Department (JPPH) despite knowing that there was no such agreement.

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