

**Dr M: Ling didn't mislead me**  
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**By M. MAGESWARI**

KUALA LUMPUR: Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad told the High Court that he was not misled by ex-Transport Minister Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik over the land price in the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) project.

Insisting that it was the Cabinet that made the decision to purchase the land, Dr Mahathir said: "I was not misled by the accused. This was an urgent matter. It had taken more than three years.

"I remember that due to the Attorney-General's comments on some hanky-panky going on and other ideas about compulsory acquisition (of the land), it caused delays.

"Because of all these, we lost billions of ringgit in terms of investment when Jebel Ali, a successful port operator decided to pull out," he said.

The Cabinet, he stressed, also obtained views that the project was viable and it could "not keep listening to arguments to and fro forever".

"It had to make a decision. The Cabinet might have said at the beginning that the price was too high but this had gone on for three years. We were in a hurry.

"We needed to acquire the land and start the hub (Transshipment Mega Hub project in Pulau Indah)," he said, adding that the price cited by Dr Ling in his letters to him were also much lower than that suggested by the Valuation and Property Services Department (JPPH).

"If he (Dr Ling) had said RM30 psf or RM50 psf, I may agree (that he misled). But the price (quoted by Dr Ling) was lower than the figure quoted by JPPH, which suggested RM25 psf and above in one letter, and RM25.82 psf in another," he said.

In contrast, Dr Ling, added Dr Mahathir, had merely stated RM25 psf in his letters to him in 2002.

Dr Ling is alleged to have deceived the Government by not revealing to the Cabinet an additional interest rate of 7.5% annually in the RM1.088bil (at RM25 psf) purchase of the land for the PKFZ project at the Prime Minister's Office in Putrajaya between Sept 25, 2002 and Nov 6, 2002.

Dr Ling, 70, also claimed trial to two alternative charges of cheating, which carry a lesser penalty.

Asked by lead prosecutor Datuk Tun Abdul Majid Tun Hamzah over his understanding of the price in 2002 as he had referred to RM25 psf as "cash price" during his testimony in October and "contract price" when cross-examined now, Dr Mahathir admitted that he might have used the wrong technical term.

"I am not an accountant. You can get mixed up. Sometimes, you talk about special price, then cash price. And then, another price was used for the raising of bond and for payment over 15 years.

"I might have not distinguished between cash price, contract price and special price," he said.

To Tun Abdul Majid's suggestion that even a schoolboy would understand the term "cash" and that he was not being truthful in court, Dr Mahathir said:

"I beg your pardon. I am being truthful. I merely said I might have used the terms inaccurately because I was not familiar with them.

"And schoolboys do not understand cash price, contract price and special price. They may understand cash. On that, I am as good as a schoolboy."

Asked if he knew that the Cabinet had given the approval for Port Klang Authority to pay RM1.8bil for the land, he said: "(I) supposed I have taken into consideration."

Questioned further by Tun Majid on his understanding of the numbers, Dr Mahathir said:

"As I have said many times, the cash price was RM21 psf. The RM25 psf was the contract price for the SPA due to the periods of no payment and differing amounts to be paid on different years.

"When you add the interest on the RM25 psf over the 15 years, these payments, when calculated back (discounted), will reflect the cash price of RM21 psf."

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