

**It was "raining rocks" witnesses tell Penang Umno tower disaster inquiry panel**  
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**By ELIZABETH ZACHARIAH**

Two witnesses who were at Jalan Macalister in George Town, Penang, when the lightning arrester atop Menara Umno toppled on June 13, told the Commission of Inquiry that it was "raining rocks" before the structure crashed on moving vehicles.

Goh Keng Liang told the three-man panel that he was riding his motorcycle when he saw "rocks falling" and a stone hit him in the leg.

"I looked up and I saw the structure swaying, almost about to topple.

"Instinct told me to get out of there. And as I quickly turned into another road, I heard something crash behind me," said the 60-year-old man.

Goh described the loud sound "like a tree falling down", adding that he saw a driver of a lorry carrying gas tanks flee, leaving the co-driver behind in the vehicle.

"The roof of the lorry had caved in but no one could go near to pull him out as concrete rocks were still falling down," the odd-job worker told the Commission of Inquiry into infrastructure failures in Penang.

The three-man panel is led by former Bar Council president Datuk Yeoh Yang Poh, who is assisted by engineers Professor Roslan Hashim and Datuk Dr Gue See Sew. Inquiry commissioners Yeoh (right) and Roslan at the Penang High Court today. The Malaysian Insider pic by Hasnoor Hussain, October 11, 2013. Inquiry commissioners Yeoh (right) and Roslan at the Penang High Court today. The Malaysian Insider pic by Hasnoor Hussain, October 11, 2013.

Lawyers Mureli Navaratnam and Ong Yu Shin are acting as conducting officers.

Earlier, the panel heard testimony from Chong Ai Wye, whose Ford Focus was badly damaged in the incident after chunks of concrete fell from atop the building.

The 33-year-old was heading towards Anson Road when she heard a loud noise from above.

"I just stepped on my accelerator and moved forward. And I kept hearing crash sounds."

Chong revealed that she stopped her car a distance away from Menara Umno and stepped out to inspect the damage to her vehicle.

"My front windscreen was shattered and the back of the car was damaged as well," she said.

When asked by Mureli what the weather was like at that time, she replied, "the wind was very strong and there was only slight rain".

The Menara Umno building became the centre of an inquiry after the incident last June when a 42-metre high lightning arrester atop the 21-storey structure collapsed, crushing seven vehicles, causing two fatalities and causing injuries to eight others.

The dead were Indian national Jahir Hussain Sulaiman, 46, and hawker Lim Chin Aik, whose car was completely smashed and pushed into the ground by the fallen concrete mast.

Lim was presumed dead as his body was never found. An inquest was held to investigate the circumstances of his death.

The inquiry is expected to go on for 40 days with testimonies from eye witnesses, engineers, architects and building experts.

This morning, Tan Lin Hai, an architect with the Building Department in the Penang Town Council (MPPP) since 2003, was the first to take the stand.

The commission is expected to visit the site tomorrow morning before continuing with the proceedings at the Technology Court in the Penang Court Complex. - October 11, 2013.

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