

Professor acquitted of 21 graft charges in Sabah

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KOTA KINABALU: A university professor was acquitted by the Sessions Court of 21 charges of making false claims involving research funds related to marine activities in Sabah.

Sessions Court judge Jason Juga discharged and acquitted Prof. Dr. Charles Santhanasaraju Vairappan of all the charges without calling for his defence, after finding that the prosecution failed to establish a prima facie case against him.

In his judgment on Friday (Sept 11), Jason said the prosecution failed to prove the elements of the charges.

“In assessing the evidence presented during the prosecution’s case, based on the facts, I found there were doubts in the testimony such that the charges could not be proven.

“This includes the allegation that the accused submitted documents containing false material details, which he believed to be so, with intent to deceive his principal as stated in the charges,” the judge said in his ruling.

The court also ordered the return of Charles’s bail money and the release of his passport.

Charles had pleaded not guilty to all 21 charges on July 20, 2022 at the Special Corruption Court here.

He was accused of submitting claim documents in the form of official receipts containing false details to officers of Universiti Malaysia Sabah’s (UMS) Treasury Department between May 2014 and April 2017, with intent to deceive his principal.

The receipts involved payments ranging from RM300 to RM5,550, totalling RM66,190, for activities such as diving, boat rentals to several islands, and van rentals—expenses which were allegedly never incurred.

He was charged under Section 18 of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) Act 2009, punishable under Section 24(2) of the same Act, which provides for a maximum 20-year prison sentence and a fine of five times the amount involved or RM10,000, whichever is higher, if convicted.

The prosecution called 26 witnesses during the trial.