

Beheading plot raised during Adelson court testimony

Casino magnate defends his multibillion-dollar empire from accusations of bribery, organized crime links

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Casino magnate and Republican megadonor Sheldon Adelson in Las Vegas, Nevada, 2014. (Ethan Miller/Getty Images/AFP)

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Casino mogul Sheldon Adelson found himself answering questions in a Las Vegas courtroom last week about what he knew about a plot to **behead** employees in Macau and if Chinese government promises were broken as Las Vegas Sands Corp. developed properties on the lucrative Cotai Strip.

The billionaire chairman of Sands and Venetian resorts in Las Vegas, Macau and Singapore testified Tuesday at proceedings that mostly focused on jurisdiction for the wrongful termination lawsuit filed by ousted Sands China Ltd. chief Steven Jacobs.

With reporters and Nevada gambling regulators taking notes, Adelson, the top Republican Party donor in the US, found himself characterizing a dispute with China about obtaining permits for an apartment high-rise in Macau.

“I want to rephrase. It was a misunderstanding,” Adelson responded when Jacobs’ attorney, James Pisanelli, asked him to describe an earlier comment about broken commitments by government officials about strata-title.

“We thought it was condos. They thought, I’m not sure, that it was apartments rented out like hotels,” Adelson said.

Minutes later, Adelson asked Clark County District Court Judge Elizabeth Gonzalez to block as inappropriate a Pisanelli question about dealings with

Hong Kong businessman Cheung Chi-tai.

Cheung, an investor in a publicly traded company that handled so-called junket gambling tours to Macau, was identified in a US Senate report in 1992 as a high-ranking gang figure. He was also named in 2011 by a Hong Kong appeals court as an organized crime leader who ordered the death of a Sands Macau casino dealer.

Cheung wasn't charged in the case. A subordinate was convicted of a murder conspiracy charge.

"Your honor, Mr. Pisanelli is making erroneous — intentional but erroneous — statements that we were doing business with Chung Chi-tai," Adelson said. "We were not doing business with Chung Chi-tai, therefore the question is completely inappropriate."

No, the judge said, the question was whether Adelson, as chairman of Las Vegas Sands and Sands China Ltd., would be aware of death threats against his employees.

Adelson said he and his company were always looking for "appropriate and inappropriate activity" at their properties and continued to protest.

"He asked me about somebody with whom we are doing business," he said. "OK. We are not doing business with him, and therefore I can't answer."

Adelson paused.

"If somebody is going to chop my employees' heads off, of course I would be interested," he said. "But he wasn't. And we weren't doing business with him. It feeds their narrative of, 'only Adelson is involved in wrongdoing, not Jacobs.'"

Gonzalez is being asked to decide if she has jurisdiction to hear Jacobs' civil lawsuit, which contains allegations of misdeeds at Macau properties that Jacobs ran.

Adelson maintained on his fourth day on the witness stand that Las Vegas Sands and Sands China Ltd. officials are "extremely meticulous" about avoiding conflicts with regulatory agencies in the US and abroad.

Jacobs alleges that his firing in Macau was orchestrated from Las Vegas.

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