

1MDB trial: Ex-chair, Najib's lawyer lock horns over PAC report

Malaysiakini

17 May 2022

Hidir Reduan Abdul Rashid

A contentious exchange between 1MDB's former chairperson Mohd Bakke Salleh and Najib Abdul Razak's lead counsel Muhammad Shafee Abdullah heated up the atmosphere at the Kuala Lumpur High Court today.

The war of words between the 15th prosecution witness and the defence lawyer was triggered over whether the former's full testimony was captured in the 2016 Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report over the 1MDB affair.

As judge Collin Lawrence Sequerah looked on today during the RM2.28 billion 1MDB corruption trial against Najib, Shafee asked Bakke whether he stood by what he testified to the PAC in February 2016.

Shafee: Do you stand by what you said to the PAC?

Bakke: Yang Arif, can I say something?

Shafee: You must answer yes or no.

Sequerah: You (Bakke) must answer. It is a put question (from Shafee).

Shafee: This is not Petronas but the court of law.

Bakke: I need to explain.

Shafee: Answer first, then you can explain until the cows come home.

Bakke (above) was appointed as chairperson of national oil company Petronas during the Muhyiddin Yassin-led Perikatan Nasional administration last year.

Not full testimony

Bakke agreed he stood by what he told the PAC but claimed the resulting final PAC report did not record his full testimony.

When Shafee repeated the question of whether the witness stood by what was reported by the PAC report on 1MDB, Bakke said he had no oversight over what went into the report.

Bakke claimed the most important parts of his testimony were not included.

This caused Shafee to retort whether Bakke was a prosecution witness or an accused person on trial, and the latter conceded that he is a witness.

Sequerah then explained to Bakke that as a prosecution witness, he only need to answer yes or no to Shafee's questions and that the witness has an opportunity to explain his answers during re-examination by the prosecution.

Towards the end of the proceedings, Bakke agreed with Shafee that 1MDB's management may have misled not only the board but also Najib.

In February 2016, during the Najib-led BN administration, the PAC heard testimony from Bakke and several other individuals over the issue of alleged embezzlement at the Malaysian government-owned sovereign wealth fund.

During this morning's proceedings, Shafee was conducting a cross-examination on Bakke's testimony to the PAC.

The tension initially started when the lawyer asked hypothetically whether Bakke may not have resigned as 1MDB chairperson if the witness had not lost his cool when dealing with the issue of US\$700 million of the fund's monies.

Bakke retorted that Shafee should not be putting words in the former's mouth, as his memory was still okay, adding that in hindsight he should not have served as 1MDB chairperson.

Suspicious of Najib

Previously, in a separate 1MDB audit report criminal trial against Najib, Bakke testified that he resigned as the fund's board chairperson on Oct 19, 2009.

Bakke claimed he resigned following the revelation that US\$700 million of 1MDB funds - meant for its proposed joint venture with Petrosaudi International Limited (PSI) - were diverted to Good Star Limited and due to his suspicion that Najib may be involved in irregular transactions.

Good Star is an entity allegedly controlled by businessperson Low Taek Jho, who is also known as Jho Low. The prosecution claimed Low's involvement in wrongdoing at 1MDB was done on the behest of Najib.

Bakke also previously testified he found it unusual that Najib did not respond to his SMS message in 2009 over his misgivings regarding alleged financial wrongdoing at 1MDB.

Najib is on trial for four counts of abuse of power and 21 counts of money laundering involving RM2.28 billion of 1MDB's funds.

The prosecution contended that the wrongdoing at 1MDB was done by businessperson Jho Low under the authority of Najib.

The defence team claimed the accused had no knowledge of wrongdoing and that the whole embezzlement scheme was solely masterminded by Low and several members of the fund's management team.

Besides being a former premier and finance minister, Najib also used to be the chairperson of 1MDB's board of advisors.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd

Source: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/621460>