

Dr M summoned police for 1MDB briefing 5 days after becoming PM

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1MDB TRIAL | A retired investigating officer has testified that Dr Mahathir Mohamad summoned the police for a briefing on the 1MDB investigation, five days after being sworn in as prime minister on May 10, 2018.

R Rajagopal told the High Court in Putrajaya that he gave Mahathir the briefing during a meeting at Yayasan Perdana.

During today's RM2.27 billion 1MDB abuse of power and money laundering trial against ex-PM Najib Abdul Razak, Rajagopal explained that he briefed Mahathir on the state and stage of the investigation into 1MDB.

Between 2015 and 2018, Rajagopal was investigating a criminal breach of trust allegedly involving 1MDB's board of directors and management.

"After the 14th general election on May 9, 2018, namely on May 15, I was directed to give a briefing to Mahathir and I had gone (to Yayasan Perdana) with then inspector-general of police Fuzi Harun and (then police commercial crime

investigation department director) Amar Singh to give a PowerPoint presentation.

"(This was) five days (after Mahathir was sworn in on May 10), I briefed him (Mahathir) on the investigation and we said this is what we did in Malaysia and he just said to complete (gathering) evidence from foreign jurisdictions to complete the investigation.

"During the briefing, I highlighted the DOJ (US Justice Department) complaint in 2016 and 2017 (over alleged embezzlement of funds from 1MDB) and showed proceeds from 1MDB and it (funds) landed among others in Najib's account," Rajagopal told deputy public prosecutor Ahmad Akram Gharib.

During Akram's cross-examination, the subpoenaed defence witness agreed with the prosecution that the direction of the 1MDB investigation changed after GE14 when the premiership changed from Najib to Mahathir.

It should be noted that Rajagopal did not conduct the police investigation into Najib and money laundering allegations at 1MDB. The 1MDB trial only involved alleged abuse of power and money laundering against Najib.

Akram objects to Shafee's line of questioning

When lead defence counsel Shafee Abdullah in re-examination tried to delve deeper into the police meeting with Mahathir at Yayasan Perdana, Akram objected as it was irrelevant to the 1MDB trial.

Akram also argued that the defence's line of questioning could amount to being scandalous without the oral evidence having relevance to the trial.

In response, Shafee countered that the criminal court should allow him to ask Rajagopal to go deeper into the meeting because the lawyer wanted to show that Najib, when in power between 2009 and 2018, never once called the police to inquire into the 1MDB probe.

Shafee explained that his line of re-examination is necessary to demolish the prosecution's contention that the direction of the investigation in 1MDB was different when Najib was in power and changed when the accused was no longer in power.

Judge Collin Lawrence Sequerah allowed Shafee to continue his line of re-examination.

Pace of probe

During Shafee's questioning, Rajagopal said he did not recall Mahathir asking

why the pace of investigation was not moving fast during Najib's administration.

Rajagopal said he did not get the impression that Mahathir was unhappy with the pace of the police investigation, adding that he would have been replaced if the then premier was so.

The retired police investigator repeatedly answered no when Shafee asked whether anybody at the meeting suggested any specific personality to be charged over the 1MDB affair.

Rajagopal testified that during the briefing, he told Mahathir that the police needed to try to obtain evidence from the US, Singapore and Switzerland.

He explained during the briefing that the police had yet to recommend anybody specific to be charged as evidence of the 1MDB transaction was overseas, while the board's related decision was done in Malaysia.

The defence witness added that following the Yayasan Perdana meeting, the investigation paper was handed over to the Attorney-General's Chambers (AGC) for further action and he lodged a report under the Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001 (Amla) to commence investigation.

The trial resumes tomorrow.

Previously, Rajagopal testified that Najib only became a suspect in the authorities' eyes later in the investigation.

Prima facie established

On Oct 30 last year, the High Court ordered Najib to enter his defence over four abuses of power and 21 money laundering charges involving RM2.27 billion from 1MDB.

Sequerah ruled that the prosecution had succeeded in establishing a prima facie (answerable) case against Najib due to the strength of some 50 witness testimonies.

The prosecution witnesses included former members of 1MDB management, including former CEO Shahrol Azral Ibrahim Halmi, former chief financial officer Azmi Tahir, and former general counsel Jasmine Loo.

Between early December last year and late January this year, Najib spent 26 days on the witness stand trying to raise reasonable doubt in the prosecution's case.

The accused contended that he had no knowledge or involvement in wrongdoing

at 1MDB and that embezzlement there was solely masterminded by fugitive businessperson Low Taek Jho (Jho Low) and the management of the sovereign wealth fund.

The former Pekan MP also relied on the defence that he was promised a donation by the late Saudi monarch King Abdullah during a meeting in Riyadh in 2010.

Since August 2022, Najib has been serving a six-year jail sentence over an abuse of power, CBT, and money laundering case involving RM42 million of funds from SRC International, a former subsidiary of 1MDB that later became fully owned by MoF Inc.

Early last year, the Pardons Board issued a statement for Najib's initial SRC case penalty of 12 years in jail and RM210 million fine to be discounted to six years imprisonment and RM50 million.

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