

NAJIB'S 1MDB TRIAL TO BEGIN MONDAY

Judge eager to start but both sides plead for more time

SHARANJIT SINGH
AND KHAIRAH N. KARIM
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

THE 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) trial involving Datuk Seri Najib Razak failed to take off yet again even though the judge was all revved up to begin proceedings yesterday.

Justice Collin Lawrence Sequerah tried everything he could to kick-start the proceedings, but

had to eventually tell both sides to be ready by next Monday after they pleaded for more time.

He set this Thursday for case mention of the trial, where Najib is facing four charges of using his positions to obtain gratification amounting to RM2.3 billion of 1MDB funds and 21 counts of money laundering involving the same money."

The case, which has garnered international media attention with foreign reporters and those from major news agencies present in court, had been postponed several times.

The adjournments were mostly because both sides wanted the 1MDB trial to start after Najib's case involving the abuse of SRC International Sdn Bhd's funds in another court is completed.

At the onset of the hearing yesterday, former Federal Court judge Datuk Seri Gopal Sri Ram, who is the lead prosecutor, requested the trial begin on Sept 3.

He informed the judge that there were three compelling reasons for this. He said the prosecution was unable to proceed with the trial as Najib's SRC In-

ternational case had yet to be concluded.

"The last witness (in the SRC trial) is giving evidence-in-chief and I was informed that everything can only be wrapped up by the end of this week."

He said the second reason for the postponement request was because the prosecution was unable to serve the witness statement of 12 witnesses to the defence until last Friday.

Thirdly, he said there were 15 bundles of documents that the prosecution had just served the defence yesterday.

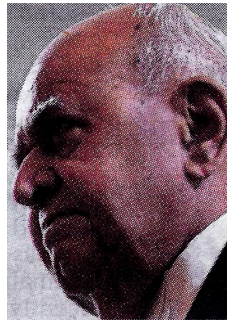
Najib's lead counsel, Tan Sri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah, said the defence needed time to prepare as some witness statements were more than 200 pages.

"We need time to read every page and prepare."

However, Sequerah said he wanted the trial to start next Monday and told both parties to prepare for it. He asked, if the prosecution was ready to proceed with the opening statement, but Sri Ram said he was not ready.

Later, Shafee said the overlapping of the 1MDB and SRC International trials would affect the defence's ability to prepare its case.

"Yes, of course it will affect our preparations. Handling two trials simultaneously is not as easy as walking from one court to another," he said when asked if his preparations would be affected now that both trials were set to go on simultaneously.



Datuk Seri Gopal Sri Ram