

Digital agency set up solely to manage Najib's online presence

KUALA LUMPUR: A digital agency that received RM2mil, allegedly from 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) funds, was set up solely to manage Datuk Seri Najib Razak's personal online communications and online assets.

Noorhaina Hirawani Mohd Noor, who was the former chief executive officer (CEO) of Orb Solutions Sdn Bhd, told the High Court that the RM2mil in the form of a cheque with Najib's signature was a typical payment for day-to-day operations, utilities, salary, rental and other expenses that the company bore in providing services as a digital agency.

When lead prosecutor Datuk Seri Gopal Sri Ram pressed further on the specific purpose of the payment, Noorhaina said she could not explain specifically as she did not have the records.

In response to questions from Najib's counsel Tan Sri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah, Noorhaina confirmed that neither herself, Orb

Solutions or Amhari Nazaruddin, who was also a director of the company, was charged with receiving the RM2mil.

As the CEO and a co-founder of the firm, Noorhaina said she planned its day-to-day operations and communications strategies and also communicated those strategies to Najib and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

She told the court that her engagement with Najib and the PMO came about because Barisan Nasional had a reduced margin in its general election victory in 2008 and it was also at that time that the Opposition had been using the online sphere more effectively.

"At the same time, the government looked at social media and online communications with a lot of suspicion and distrust.

"Therefore it was believed that in order to harness the potential of online communication, it had to be done outside and in a personal

"The government looked at social media and online communications with a lot of suspicion."

Noorhaina Hirawani

capacity rather than a government capacity," she said.

Noorhaina also told the court that she was recruited by Omar Mustapha of Ethos Consulting in 2008 as an independent contractor to assist in running a team of independent contractors to provide digital communication services to Najib.

This came after she had been with Media Prima Bhd for eight years.

When Muhammad Shafee asked why Omar recruited her, Noorhaina said it was because of personal con-

nections. Following her role at Orb Solutions, Noorhaina was seconded to the PMO as Najib's digital press secretary and her privileges, salary and allowances were paid by Orb Solutions. The government did not pay her any salary.

She served in that role from August 2013 to October 2014. She joined Perbadanan PR1MA Malaysia several months later and is now the regional head for client engagement at Dattel.

Speaking outside the court, Muhammad Shafee said a RM24,000 salary for a specialist like Noorhaina was for good reason because she was a competent person.

"You can't just invite her for a salary grade of 48 and 52 because it's quite laughable. You will get like RM6,000 maximum.

"The government service can never pay her RM24,000, so they had to engage her as a private contractor," he said, adding that the prime minister's salary at that time

was also around RM24,000.

Other witnesses examined yesterday included the Cabinet and Constitution Division secretary under the Prime Minister's Department (PMD) Datuk Dr Farizah Ahmad, PMD treasury division accountant Natasha Rahimah Haryati Mohamad and MP affairs division head Farah Nurdiana Azhar.

Dr Farizah confirmed all Najib's Cabinet appointments right up to the end of his prime-ministership on May 10 last year, while Natasha Rahimah confirmed that she provided the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) with Najib's payslips from 2009 to 2018.

Farah Nurdiana told the High Court that Najib received monthly allowances of RM19,846.59, which was banked into his Affin account.

High Court judge Justice Collin Lawrence Sequerah adjourned the trial at 1.45pm yesterday and ordered for it to resume at 9.30am today.