

NAJIB'S TRIAL TO START ON TUESDAY

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He will stand trial on 7 charges involving RM42 million linked to SRC International

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WHEN Barisan Nasional suffered a stunning loss in the 14th General Election, the whole world anticipated that it would be a matter of time before former prime minister and the party's former president, Datuk Seri Najib Razak, faced charges over corruption offences.

From then on, journalists and photographers from local and international press agencies have been waiting in the vicinity of the Kuala Lumpur Courts Complex here, not wanting to miss what has been dubbed by some as the trial of the century.

On Tuesday, the wait may finally be over. Najib, who has claimed trial to 42 counts of various criminal charges, will stand trial on seven charges involving RM42 million of SRC International

al Sdn Bhd's funds. On that day, three out of 50 prosecution witnesses, some of whom are officials from SRC International, will be called to the stand to testify.

The trial before High Court judge Mohd Nazlan Mohd Ghazali, which is set for 33 days, will continue until Feb 28 and from March 4 to 29.

Throughout the trial, documents of more than 3,000 pages which have been submitted by the prosecution, including the SRC International meeting minutes and statements from witnesses, will be presented.

For the prosecution team, the Attorney-General's Chambers (A-GC) has recruited top criminal lawyers, including former Malaysian Bar president Datuk Sulaiman Abdullah and veteran lawyer Datuk V. Sithambaram, who is the co-chairman of the Malaysian Bar Criminal Law Committee.

Najib's defence team will be led by senior lawyer Tan Sri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah, who was the deputy public prosecutor in Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's second sodomy appeal.

Despite attempts by Najib's defence to have the trial postponed, the prosecution has stood firm in wanting to proceed with the trial on the scheduled date

as preparations have been made. Through a letter dated Jan 17, the A-GC stated that it objected to the postponement request, saying that it was frivolous and would delay the scheduled trial.

During a mention proceedings, Najib's defence had attempted to seek postponement of the trial pending appeal on three interlocutory applications in relation to Najib's gag order application on the media coverage of the case, on the defence's application for discovery of further documents and statements, and on the appointment of Sulaiman as lead prosecutor in the case.

On Nov 28, Chief Judge of Malaya Tan Sri Zaharah Ibrahim denied the prosecution's application to move the trials to the Palace of Justice in Putrajaya on the grounds that courts there are not designed to hear trial cases.

Najib was first charged on July 4 at the Sessions Court with three counts of criminal breach of trust and one count of abuse of power for gratification from SRC International involving RM42 million.

He faced three money laundering charges on Aug 8.

He posted a RM2 million bail for all the charges and surrendered both his international and diplomatic passports to the court.