

'JHO LOW WAS IN NAJIB'S INNER CIRCLE'

Former special aide says fugitive businessman worked behind the scenes for ex-prime minister

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THE High Court here yesterday heard that fugitive businessman Low Taek Jho, or Jho Low, had "extraordinary powers" as he worked behind the scenes for former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak in government-to-government negotiations, international relations and funding.

Najib's former special officer, Datuk Amhari Efendi Nazaruddin, said this when he took the stand as the eighth prosecution witness in the 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) trial yesterday.

Amhari, who worked for Najib for 10 years, said Low was close to Najib's family, especially Najib's wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor.

"My first meeting with Low was at a restaurant in George Town, Penang, after I was promoted as economic director in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in March 2014.

"Donning a batik T-shirt, Jho Low was talkative and indicated that he was in the inner circle of the former prime minister's family.

"He knew Najib through the latter's stepson, Riza Shahriz Abdul Aziz, or Riza Aziz, as they had known each other since they were teenagers.

"Rosmah had no issue with Low being close to her family.

"She had called Low numerous times, although the gist of the conversations were not known," he said when reading his 77-page witness statement.

Amhari said most of the instructions from Low must be followed as they were agreed by Najib beforehand.

"I worked for Najib for 10 years.

"He would usually meet Low to discuss issues, including confidential matters.

"Sometimes, my boss, the late Datuk Azlin Alias, who was Najib's chief special officer, and I would receive confidential instructions from Low, to which Najib had agreed.

"I can say this (Najib agreed) because when Azlin double-checked, Najib said he knew and had agreed to it."

Amhari said when he was appointed Najib's special officer in 2008, Low texted to congratulate him.

"He said: 'Bro, I heard you are in TPM's (deputy prime minister's) office. Congratulations. We will be closely in touch.'"

Amhari claimed Low had used him to get close to Azlin, who was also a Najib loyalist.

"He used me to set up a highly confidential meeting between him and my boss (Azlin) at Prince Hotel.

"They discussed issues, including highly confidential matters during the meeting, which took place at night in a suite room."

Amhari described Low as the mastermind behind the inception of the Terengganu Investment Authority (TIA), before it was renamed 1MDB.

He said Low had attended the meeting with Terengganu ruler Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin at Istana Terengganu in the state capital to brief him about TIA.

"I was representing PMO and Low was representing the TIA board.

"The meeting was chaired by the state ruler.

"It was an unofficial meeting and Najib was not there," Amhari said, adding that Low later briefed him about TIA in the kitchen of Low's house.

Amhari said Low played an active part in doing damage control when the 1MDB issue was reported by international and local media.

"The issue did not affect Najib as most of the articles focused on Low's lavish lifestyle.

"However, in early 2015, Najib was finally linked to 1MDB. The PMO had to step in."

Amhari said Low had given instructions to Azlin on how to cover up the issue.

Proceedings will continue today before judge Collin Lawrence Sequerah.

Najib is facing four charges of having used his position to obtain gratification totalling RM2.3 billion in 1MDB funds and 21 counts of money laundering involving the same money.

The former finance minister is alleged to have committed the offences at Amls-lamic Bank Bhd, No. 55, Jalan Raja Chulan, Bukit Ceylon, here, between Feb 24, 2011 and Dec 19, 2014.

Najib is alleged to have committed the money laundering offences at the same bank between March 22 and Aug 30, 2013.