

Amhari: Najib gave me 'tens of thousands' in cash for trips

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Najib Razak's former aide was yesterday grilled over his so-called "secret mission" to China and Abu Dhabi to sort out 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) issues in 2016.

Najib's lead counsel, Tan Sri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah, asked Datuk Amhari Efendi Nazaruddin why he referred to the trips as "a secret mission".

"You seem to think it was a 007 secret mission when it was just something you were asked to do to pave the way for the prime minister's visit to China later," Shafee said during cross-examination.

Shafee asked Amhari to explain if Najib had ever asked him to go

to China and negotiate with the Chinese to overpay for projects like the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) to "bail out" 1MDB.

Amhari confirmed that the former prime minister had never asked him to do that.

However, he maintained that his interpretation of "bailing out" 1MDB was based on talking points provided to him for the meeting with the Chinese.

Shafee: Did anyone suggest inflating prices during your meeting with the Chinese?

Amhari: Not at the meetings I attended, but there were other meetings.

Shafee: You are not suggesting that Chinese companies which are all linked to their government inflated prices?

Amhari: I don't know.

Shafee: If you want to inflate prices, it would have to be in the billions, because that is (the size of) 1MDB's debt.

Amhari: I don't know.

Shafee: The current government itself has announced that for ECRL, there was no inflation of prices, but it was just reduced as the project has been downscaled.

Amhari: I think so, yes.

Later, when re-examined by lead prosecutor Datuk Seri Gopal

Sri Ram, Amhari was asked to explain his trips to China and Abu Dhabi again.

Sri Ram asked Amhari if he was reimbursed for the expenses he incurred during his trips.

Amhari replied in the positive and said he was given cash in the "tens of thousands" by Najib.

"Najib gave me the cash when I met him at his house," he said.

Asked why he did not file his claims to the Prime Minister's Office, which was usually done for any official trip, Amhari said: "Because this was a secret mission."

Amhari said the China trip was especially difficult for him because at the time, issues concern-

ing 1MDB were widely discussed.

"So when Najib asked me to go to China, I was still okay, but when he said Jho Low was arranging the meetings, I became concerned.

"I was very, very nervous," he said, adding that at the time, he still believed Najib's claim that there was a political conspiracy against him.

Najib is facing 25 criminal charges for allegedly abusing his position to obtain gratification amounting to RM2.28 billion of 1MDB funds and money laundering.

The trial before judge Collin Lawrence Sequerah continues on Monday.