

Low close to Najib, says former 1MDB CEO

KUALA LUMPUR: A witness told the High Court yesterday that 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB)-linked fugitive businessman Low Taek Jho, or Jho Low, shared a close relationship with Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

The witness, former 1MDB chief executive officer (CEO) Datuk Shahrol Azral Ibrahim Halmi said he concluded the duo were close based on what he saw when Low took him to the former prime minister's official residence in Putrajaya.

"Gradually, I realised they were very close. I noticed this when Jho Low took me to the deputy prime minister's residence in Putrajaya. Najib was already prime minister at that time, but was still occupying the DPM's residence.

"Jho Low took me straight to the gate. He demonstrated familiarity from the entrance to the waiting area. The guard was also familiar with him. He asked for '*milo ais*' and we met Najib," Shahrol said, recalling the occasion.

Under examination-in-chief by lead prosecutor Datuk Seri Gopal Sri Ram, the witness said the conversation they had during the meeting at Najib's home was to introduce Maurizio La Noce, the

CEO of Mubadala Petroleum.

He said there were already discussions between La Noce and Najib prior to the meeting.

In his 270-page textbook-like witness statement, Shahrol said Low had direct access to Najib and this became more obvious to him when he was appointed as the CEO of Terengganu Investment Authority Berhad (TIA), now known as 1MDB.

He said he was certain Najib had given Low the mandate to manage operations of TIA, through documents, on talking points and action plans.

"Each of Low's action were agreed on and approved by Najib himself.

"I saw him as a facilitator between the Sultan of Terengganu Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin (who was then the Yang di-Per-tuan Agong) and Najib, who was representing the federal government.

"Low was an important person to Najib and had protected Najib's interest from the start."

Shahrol said through his observation during board of directors' meetings, Low could directly contact Najib to ask for his views and guidance on matters.

Trial continues tomorrow.