

Defence protests over Najib's FB post complaint

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KUALA LUMPUR: The defence in the 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) trial has protested over a complaint by the prosecution regarding Datuk Seri Najib Razak's Facebook post on former Bank Negara governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz.

The complaint was over Najib's Facebook post on Dec 29 where he urged Zeti to respond to allegations that her family received more than RM100mil, said to be from 1MDB funds, from fugitive businessman Low Taek Jho, better known as Jho Low.

Najib's lead counsel Tan Sri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah said not allowing Najib to share his thoughts on social media was akin to "a boxer being sent to the ring with both hands tied, can take punches but not being able to reply back".

I will be grateful if the court would impose a strict warning to the accused to not do this again.

Datuk Seri Gopal Sri Ram

The allegations had first surfaced on the Malaysia Today blog, which is run by fugitive blogger Raja Petra Kamaruddin.

Shafee said the defence had tried to apply for a gag order to stop the media and any person from discussing the merits of the SRC International Sdn Bhd trial but this was dismissed.

"But everyone else can say any-

thing about him (Najib). They call him a crook, a *perompak* (robber), and no action is taken," he added.

Shafee's argument came after lead prosecutor Datuk Seri Gopal Sri Ram raised a flag over the Facebook post on Zeti when the trial - which was postponed for months due to Covid-19 restrictions - resumed yesterday.

Sri Ram urged the court to give a stern warning to Najib on the matter as the accused had "attacked" the potential prosecution witness.

He pointed out that the accused knew the former governor could be called to testify as per a witness list that was made available to the defence last year and such a post would put Zeti in a difficult position.

"I don't want to move for an application to have his bail taken or for contempt, but I will be grateful if the court would impose a strict warning to the accused to not do this again.

"A trial has to take place in a court of law, not in the public domain, certainly not on social media.

"We want an assurance that our witness will not be attacked," Sri Ram said.

Shafee later told the court that the defence would do a submission on the matter on Thursday and asked the court to reserve the matter for later, which was agreed by Justice Collin Lawrence Sequerah.

On Dec 31, Zeti denied the allegations in a media statement, saying it was "completely false and malicious".

Earlier, the defence also asked the court for Najib to be excused from attending the trial on Wednesday to allow the Pekan MP to visit his constituency, which is severely affected by floods.

"The situation in the last two days, as can be seen in the media, is much worse and he (Najib) would

like to be there to meet his constituents. Otherwise, there will be words and questions of his non-presence," Shafee said.

Justice Sequerah did not allow the application.

"It is a new year. This trial has to move, so the application by your client is denied, the case has to proceed," the judge said.

The 10th prosecution witness Mohd Hazem Abdul Rahman, who was the former 1MDB CEO, took the stand for cross-examination yesterday.

Najib, 67, is facing four charges of using his position to obtain bribes totalling RM2.28bil from 1MDB funds and 21 charges of money laundering involving the same amount.

The trial continues today.