

WITNESS: JHO LOW WAS 'THE MAN OF THE PM'

Ex-1MDB chief executive says Najib gave no orders to ignore Jho Low's instructions

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FORMER 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) chief executive Mohd Hazem Abd Rahman told the High Court yesterday that Datuk Seri Najib Razak never dissociated himself from fugitive businessman Low Taek Jho, also known as Jho Low.

Jho Low, he said, was known to be "the man of the PM".

In fact, the 10th prosecution witness said the former prime minister was "very very close" to Jho Low.

Hazem said this when asked by senior deputy public prosecutor Datuk Seri Gopal Sri Ram during re-examination about the meeting that took place at Najib's house in Taman Duta, here, on

Nov 28, 2013.

He was testifying in Najib's trial over the misappropriation of RM2.28 billion from the sovereign wealth fund.

Hazem said during the meeting which was attended by him, as well as Jho Low, Najib did not say or do anything to dissociate himself from the latter.

He said he never received any orders from Najib to disregard Jho Low's instructions.

"Through my observation, Najib and Jho Low were very, very close," he said.

However, he admitted that Jho Low's role in 1MDB was concealed during a meeting with accounting firm KPMG Malaysia, which was 1MDB's auditor, to discuss the company's audit.

He said Jho Low's name was not mentioned in the meeting because the latter had given instructions to not reveal his name.

When re-examined on the removal of KPMG as 1MDB's auditor, Hazem said he was pressured by Najib to do so because the firm did not want to close the

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1MDB financial year 2013 audit report.

"I was called directly by the PM to update him on the closure. He told me to find a way to solve this, and the only way to do so was to replace it (KPMG) with a new auditor," he said.

Hazem also testified that he was in no position to disobey the accused, who was the prime minister at that time.

The witness was then asked to confirm the irregularity of the transactions which went in and out of 1MDB and denied that a single sen had gone into his own bank account.

He also denied having benefitted financially in any way from any of the transactions.

The trial continues before High Court judge Datuk Collin Lawrence Sequerah today.

Najib, 68, is charged with 25 counts of abuse of power and money laundering involving RM2.28 billion of 1MDB funds which were deposited into his accounts between 2011 and 2014.

He faces 20 years' jail and a fine, if convicted.

