

'Low seen in Najib's office even before he was PM'

By NURBAITI HAMDAN
nurbaiti@thestar.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: A former 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) chairman told the High Court that fugitive financier Low Taek Jho was seen in Datuk Seri Najib Razak's office even before the Pekan MP took office as the prime minister.

Tan Sri Mohd Bakke Salleh, 68, testified that he had met Low - better known as Jho Low - several times at Najib's office in Putrajaya when he was still the defence minister and the deputy prime minister.

The witness was being cross-examined by Najib's lead counsel Tan Sri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah in the 1MDB audit tampering trial here yesterday.

The lawyer suggested that Mohd Bakke had "the impression" that Low was coordinating on Najib's behalf but the witness replied that it was more than that.

"It wasn't just an impression. I met him at the former prime minister's office when he (Najib) was the defence minister and the deputy prime minister.

"I met Low there on a number of occasions," said Mohd Bakke.

He recalled telling Najib that Low had requested that he (Mohd Bakke) help set up the Terengganu Investment Authority (TIA), the



Case continues: Najib arriving at the courthouse for his 1MDB audit tampering trial in Kuala Lumpur - SS KANESAN/The Star

entity that would later become 1MDB.

Low's role in coordination was later reinforced with a meeting with the former King, Sultan Mizan of Terengganu, who had wanted to set up TIA.

"It wasn't something that happened by chance or came out of impression, you know. It was reinforced by two leaders," said Mohd Bakke, referring to the Sultan and Najib.

The court also heard from the witness that Najib had told him in a telephone conversation not to

spend too much time looking into past transactions and to just focus on a proposed joint venture between 1MDB and PetroSaudi International (PSI).

According to the witness, Najib told him this after the former prime minister was done speaking on the phone to Low during a 1MDB board meeting on Sept 26, 2009.

"I hate to repeat this but when the prime minister engages you in a telephone conversation after making a call to Low - on Low's phone - that drives home a very strong point," said Mohd Bakke.

However, Muhammad Shafee said just because Low appeared to be close to the prime minister, this did not mean that the board should be taking directions from him.

"The board never took direction from Jho Low," replied Mohd Bakke.

As the line of questioning was heavily based on 1MDB and Low's role instead of the 1MDB, audit report, Justice Mohamed Zaini Mazlan remarked that he felt he was sitting in "Justice Collin's court", much to the laughter of the defence and the prosecution teams.

Justice Mohamed Zaini was referring to Justice Collin Lawrence Sequerah who is presiding over Najib's other 1MDB trial relating to 25 charges involving RM2.28bil from the company's funds.

Najib, 69, is accused of abusing his position to order amendments to the 1MDB final audit report to avoid any action being taken against him while former 1MDB CEO Aral Kanda Kandasamy, 46, is accused of abetting Najib in making the amendments to the report.

Both men were charged under Section 23(1) of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) Act 2009, which provides a jail term of up to 20 years and a fine of no less than five times the amount of gratification or RM10,000, whichever is higher, upon conviction.

The hearing continues on April 12.