

'LOW HELPED WITH HAJ QUOTA'

He managed to secure 10,000 extra spots for pilgrims, says former 1MDB director Ismee

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THE High Court trial involving Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday heard how fugitive financier Jho Low managed to work miracles over the haj quota for Malaysia by securing 10,000 additional places for the country's pilgrims within weeks.

Jho Low, it was claimed, managed to do it effortlessly whereas the Malaysian ambassador to Saudi Arabia at that time had failed despite his best efforts working diplomatic channels.

Najib's lead counsel, Tan Sri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah, got this confirmed when cross-examining a key prosecution witness in the trial, former 1Malaysia Development Bhd director Tan Sri Ismee Ismail, who is also a former Tabung Haji chief executive officer.

Ismee said Low had spoken to him about the haj quota and wanted to know what it was all about in 2012 or 2013.

He said weeks after the discussion, Jho Low told him that everything had been sorted.

"He told me 'the boss' (Najib) would call me with the good news, and true enough, within 10 minutes, a cabinet minister



Datuk Seri Najib Razak arriving at the Kuala Lumpur High Court yesterday, PIC BY SAIFULLIZAN TAMADI

called me and said we had been given additional 10,000 places," Ismee said in reply to Shafee's question about Jho Low's role in raising the haj quota.

Shafee said even Najib confirmed this with him, and that Low was known to get things done through the back-channels.

"Even our ambassador at that time, Professor Datuk Syed Omar Al-Saggaf, could not do it. It was not an easy thing to do but Low, even as a non-Muslim, managed to do it."

He said Low had even arranged for the highest award given to a foreign leader by the Saudi government to be awarded to Najib.

He said only two other world leaders had been given that award: former United States president Barack Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"As Malays say, this is *lucu tapi benar* (it is funny but it is true)," Shafee said after Ismee said he too found it funny.

Ismee was testifying as the 13th prosecution witness in Najib's trial over the misappropriation of more than RM2 billion of 1MDB funds.

Earlier, Ismee was questioned about Jho Low's links with Sultan of Terengganu Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin and the roles played by former AmBank managing director Cheah Tek Kuang

and former Bank Negara governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz in the 1MDB fiasco.

He said the idea of forming the Terengganu Investment Authority (TIA), the precursor to 1MDB, was mooted by Sultan Mizan and had nothing to do with Najib.

Shafee then focused on the issuance of the RM5 billion TIA bonds in 2009, outlining how his client could not have received anything from it as his AmBank bank accounts were opened only in 2011.

He argued that it would appear no one else benefited from the RM5 billion fund-raising exercise apart from Low, an individual known as Cheah Teik Seng and Zeti's family.

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

