

BEFORE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE HEARINGS

'DON'T LINK NAJIB, JHO LOW TO 1MDB'

Former PAC chairman Hasan told Bakke not to link the duo to 1MDB mess, court hears



SHARANJIT SINGH
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

THE High Court yesterday heard how former head of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Datuk Seri Hasan Arifin had tried to influence then 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) chairman not to link Datuk Seri Najib Razak and fugitive financier Low Taek Jho @ Jho Low's names to the issues faced by the wealth fund.

Former 1MDB chairman Tan Sri Mohd Bakke Salleh spilled the beans on what had transpired before the PAC hearings were held in 2016, leading the committee to eventually absolve Najib of all

blame for 1MDB's wrongdoings.

Bakke said he received a call from Najib to meet Hasan two weeks before he was scheduled to testify at the PAC hearings.

He added that two meetings were subsequently held, and those who attended included Datuk Seri Ahmad Farid Ridzuan, who was then in charge of Najib's brand image, former 1MDB chief executives Datuk Shahrol Azral Ibrahim Halmi (at the first meeting) and Arul Kanda Kandasamy (at the second meeting).

Bakke, who is now Petronas chairman, said Hasan got the conversation started by impressing on him what should be said at the PAC hearing as there was a

need to safeguard Najib's position.

"I was told not to come up with sensitive issues which would cause ripple effects. He wanted me to be more accommodating... not to be too hard when testifying.

"I was told not to link Najib and Jho Low's names (to the issues faced by 1MDB). Jho Low's name was always a taboo... they wanted it all blamed on the 1MDB management," he said, adding that was the tone set by Hasan and Farid during the meetings.

However, Bakke said by that time he had already made up his mind on what needed to be said and that he was not going to mince his words.

He added that he now realised that the eventual final report issued by the PAC did not reflect what he had exposed then in its entirety.

The 68-year-old corporate figure reiterated that a lot of what he had revealed to the PAC then had been omitted from the report, which was later made public.

Later, when replying to another question fired by Najib's lead counsel Tan Sri Muhammad



Prosecution witness and former 1MDB chairman Tan Sri Mohd Bakke Salleh arriving at the Kuala Lumpur High Court for the continuation of the 1MDB trial yesterday. PIC BY SAIFULLIZAN TAMADI

Shafee Abdullah, Bakke said he had all the while suspected that Najib was part of the scheme of things involving the going ons in 1MDB.

He said this suspicion was based on how the then prime minister had been pressuring and pushing the 1MDB board to approve the US\$1 billion joint venture with PetroSaudi International Ltd (PSI).

Pressed by Shafee if he was saying that Najib had benefitted from the deal, Bakke replied in

the affirmative.

"Yes, yes... that was my suspicion," he said.

However, Bakke said he did not have any proof of how Najib had benefitted at that time because the information flow then was not there.

Bakke was testifying in the trial where Najib is accused of misappropriating more than US\$2.3 billion of 1MDB funds.

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