

'EX-SAUDI KING MADE DONATION TO ME'

Former PM reads from over 525-page witness statement, says King Abdullah Abdulaziz Al Saud expressed wish at audience in 2010

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DATUK Seri Najib Razak took to the stand in his own defence during his 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) corruption trial, reading from a witness statement that was 525 pages long.

The former prime minister claimed that the charges against him were politically motivated after his lead lawyer, Tan Sri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah, highlighted the timing of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission's (MACC) decision to charge his client.

Shafee said according to MACC investigating officer Nur Aida Arifin's testimony, Najib's statement was still being recorded when the "izin untuk mendakwa (consent to prosecute)" was issued.

"That in and of itself speaks a lot about the motivation to file the charges against me in court.

"They do not seem to appear to have been made after a thorough consideration of the evidence, and it certainly could not have been made after considering what I had to say to the MACC.

"This rush to charge me is yet another indication that the charges against me are politically



Datuk Seri Najib Razak entering the courtroom as the hearing into his 1MDB corruption trial began yesterday. NSTP PIC BY AIZAIRI SHAMSUDIN

motivated," he said before judge Datuk Collin Lawrence Sequerah.

Najib said he was extremely prejudiced by this conscious and deliberate omission by MACC, equally, as he, the former prime minister, had sworn to uphold the Constitution of the country.

He said the Federal Constitution did not support the practice of charging an individual and depriving them of their liberty, only to allow them the chance to explain themselves later during the trial through cross-examination.

"It is like blindfolding your opponent in a fistfight and declaring that it was a fair fight because he was still able to throw a few punches. This should not have happened to anyone," he said.

Najib, 71, faces four charges of using his position to obtain bribes totalling RM2.3 billion from 1MDB funds and 21 charges of money laundering involving the same amount.

Najib also said he did not expect the top officer of Terengganu Investment Authority (TIA), the predecessor of 1MDB, to delegate his tasks to fugitive businessman Low Taek Jho, better known as Jho Low.

During the examination-in-chief, Shafee asked his client about the practice of companies seeking government guarantees.

Najib said it was common practice for companies to seek such guarantees to obtain certain exemptions and approvals.

Shafee then asked Najib about the testimony of TIA's former chief executive Datuk Shahrol Azral Ibrahim Halmi who, when testifying as a prosecution witness, stated that he did not draft the government guarantee letter.

Shafee: Shahrol merely signed it in his capacity as CEO, while someone else prepared it.

Are you aware that Low was the one who prepared this letter?

Najib: No, I was not aware. I do not recall seeing this letter, and had I received it, I would have naturally assumed that, since Shahrol signed it, he was the one who drafted it.

Najib also revealed that money deposited into his Amlslamic Bank account was a genuine donation from Saudi Arabia, as confirmed by former Saudi minister Adel Al-Jubair.

He said Nur Aida, during her testimony as a prosecution witness, had revealed that representatives of Prince Faisal bin Turki Al Saud never denied the remittances were donations or questioned the authenticity of the accompanying letters from the Saudis.

"For all of these remittances, not once has either Amlslamic

Bank or Bank Negara Malaysia red flagged any of these remittances as being suspicious.

"They never raised any enquiry with me about either the legitimacy of the donations or of the supporting documents that were forwarded to them."

Najib said prior to those remittances, he was personally informed by the then Saudi monarch, the late King Abdullah Abdulaziz Al Saud, during a private audience in 2010 of the latter's intentions of supporting him financially.

"I also received letters confirming this Saudi Arabian donation from King Abdullah through his royal representatives, which were extended to AmBank and Bank Negara.

"It was on this basis and on the suggestion of my former private secretary, the late Datuk Azlin Alias, for me to open a bank account to receive these personal political donations.

"I agreed to open up accounts at Amlslamic Bank Bhd under my personal name.

"Later, on a different date, I was informed by Low that King Abdullah would be donating about US\$1 billion," he said.

Najib said he was informed by Azlin that the process and procedures for opening his bank account would be handled by Amlslamic Bank's former chief executive Cheah Teck Kuang.

"I wanted to ensure full transparency. This I believe is a non-disputed fact in this trial."

He also denied ever setting foot in the Amlslamic Bank branch near Jalan Raja Chulan here. According to the charge, between Feb 24 and June 14, 2011, Najib, in his capacity as prime minister, finance minister and chairman of the 1MDB advisory board, allegedly used his position for personal gain by laundering RM60,629,839.43, through one of the Amlslamic accounts he opened.

