

Najib: We just had tea together

Ex-PM says meeting on yacht had no connection to 1MDB

By **NURBAITI HAMDAN**
nurbaiti@thestar.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: It was absurd to suggest that family and friends would be present during a meeting to plot siphoning billions from 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB), the High Court has been told.

Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the meeting between him, two Saudi nationals and fugitive businessman Low Taek Jho, known as Jho Low, was an informal afternoon tea on board a yacht at the invitation of the Saudi royal, Prince Turki.

Najib said he was with his wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, his children Nor Ashman Razak and Nooryana Najwa, and stepson Riza Shahriz Abdul Aziz (Riza Aziz) on a private family vacation in southern France in 2009.

"Apart from my family, my friend Tan Sri Bustari Yusuf and his children also joined us.

"You can immediately visualise from my group membership that it was meant to be a private holiday to begin with," he said in his witness statement yesterday.

Najib, under an examination-in-chief by his lead counsel Tan Sri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah, said he was pretty surprised when he received the invitation from Prince Turki for him and his family to join high tea on board the RM Elegance yacht.

"Prince Turki was the favourite son of King Abdullah, the reigning King of Saudi Arabia at the time. I graciously accepted the invitation.

"When we boarded the yacht, we were greeted by Prince Turki and a gentleman who introduced himself as Tarek Obaid (Petrosaudi International Ltd chief executive officer) and

upon entering the living room, Jho Low was there," said Najib.

Najib, however, said it was not surprising for him to see Low as he was known for his well-established connections with Middle Eastern royalty.

"The meeting I had with Prince Turki, Tarek Obaid and Low during the afternoon tea was informal and nothing like what was suggested.

"It was, in fact, the first time I met both Prince Turki and Tarek Obaid. The idea that we could have been discussing some sinister plan is not only ridiculous but entirely unfounded," he added.

Had there been a hidden agenda or nefarious intent, Najib said he would not have allowed photographs to be taken showing them together.

"The suggestion that we were plotting anything underhanded while my family and friends were present is absurd and unnatural," he said.

He said it was misleading and unfair for individuals not part of the meeting to speculate and draw adverse inferences to serve the prosecution's narrative against him.

Najib is facing four counts of using his position to obtain RM2.28bil gratification from 1MDB's funds and 21 counts of money laundering involving the same amount.

The charges were framed under Section 23(1) of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) Act 2009 and is punishable under Section 24(1) of the same Act.

If convicted at the end of the defence case, Najib faces imprisonment of up to 20 years and a fine of five times the amount of gratification or RM10,000, whichever is higher.

The hearing continues today before Justice Collin Lawrence Sequerah.