

Najib denies 'pressuring' phone call

I only pointed out merits of proposed JV to 1MDB board, says ex-PM

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PUTRAJAYA: Former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has denied exerting his influence through a phone call to pressure 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) into entering a joint venture (JV) with PetroSaudi International (PSI) in 2009.

The High Court here was told of a phone call made by fugitive financier Low Taek Jho to Najib.

During the call, Low, better known as Jho Low, asked Najib if he would speak to former 1MDB board chairman Tan Sri Mohd Bakke Salleh before a board meeting took place on Sept 29, 2009, to speak of a purported government-

to-government (G2G) initiative between Malaysia and Saudi Arabia.

Najib denied the contention that he put pressure during the phone conversation and said the phone call was only to indicate that the proposed JV was a strategic initiative between the two nations and ultimately strengthening bilateral relations.

"The board members were not influenced by my phone call. Tan Sri Mohd Bakke chaired the meeting and the other board members did not know about the telephone call.

"The telephone call did not influence the decision of the board to enter the joint venture," Najib said during cross-examina-

tion by deputy public prosecutor Ahmad Akram Gharib at the RM2.28bil 1MDB trial yesterday.

The prosecution contended that Low had wanted Najib to speak on the phone regarding RM4.3bil that 1MDB had raised from Islamic Medium Term Notes (IMTN) bonds.

DPP Ahmad Akram said that when it comes to such a big amount, Najib should have done more than merely having a phone conversation with Mohd Bakke about the utilisation of the money.

Najib, however, said he doubted his phone call would lead to anything detrimental to the company.

"1MDB's board of directors are

professionals. I doubted the call would lead to anything that would be detrimental to 1MDB or the country's interest.

"That's why I wanted them to consider it but a normal process of due diligence must be carried out," Najib added.

DPP Ahmad Akram then contended that Najib knew 1MDB had RM4.3bil to be utilised and had encouraged Low to present it to the 1MDB board of directors for consideration despite Low not holding any position in 1MDB.

Najib denied "encouraging" Low to present to the board, adding that the board had invited Low to be there.

DPP Ahmad Akram: Even worse, Jho Low is a third person,

a third party. Just by saying he is representing King Abdullah's interests, then you said "pergi lah present to the board" (please present to the board).

Najib: I didn't say "pergi lah", the board invited him to be there. I am only concerned about the big picture because I believe PSI is owned by Prince Turki and his family That was my belief.

On Oct 30, Najib was ordered by the High Court to enter his defence on 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 hearing continues before Justice Collin Lawrence Sequerah today.