

## **Appeals court upholds former Malaysian PM Najib's 1MDB conviction**

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**By Kamles Kumar**

Najib Razak had appealed sentence claiming he did not know origin of money that ended up in his personal bank accounts.

A Malaysian appeals court on Wednesday upheld former Prime Minister Najib Razak's conviction for corruption in the first case related to the multi-billion dollar scandal at state fund 1MDB.

Najib, whose term as prime minister ended with defeat at the 2018 elections, was found guilty of diverting an estimated 42 million ringgit (\$9.88m) from SRC International, a division of 1MDB, into his personal bank accounts in July last year, and sentenced to 12 years in prison.

"We dismiss the motion and affirm the conviction on all sentences," Judge Abdul Karim Abdul Jalil said, announcing the unanimous decision of the three judges who made up the appeals panel in the administrative capital of Putrajaya.

The 68-year-old had been allowed bail pending appeal, and the court agreed he should remain free while he appeals to the Federal Court, Malaysia's highest court.

The seven charges in the SRC case involve allegations of abuse of power, several counts of money laundering and criminal breach of trust.

Both Najib, his lead counsel, Muhammad Shafee Abdullah, and the other members of the defence team appeared via video call from their homes because of the coronavirus. Dressed in a dark suit, the former prime minister showed little emotion as Judge Abdul Karim Abdul Jalil read out the panel's findings.

**“This is not something that can be said to have been done in the national interest, instead national embarrassment,”** Judge Abdul Karim told the court.

The court decision comes as Najib attempts a comeback in a country that has been through three prime ministers since the 1MDB scandal brought down his government. He remains popular within the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), which is now back in power after 2018's defeat.

In recent days, Najib and his legal team have sought to introduce new evidence, and on Tuesday asked for a postponement because one member on the team had tested positive for COVID-19. The judge denied the request, and dismissed the application to accept new evidence at an online hearing.

In reaching his guilty verdict last year, Judge Mohamad Nazlan Ghazali said Najib, who was both prime minister and finance minister at the time of the offences, “acted outside the limits of the permissible conduct” in the approval of loans, which later became a source of funds transferred to his account.

He said Najib “benefitted” from the approval of the loans, and that the defence had failed to raise reasonable doubt over the offence of abuse of power.

During the appeal, the defence argued that Najib did not know the money was going into his accounts or that it originated from SRC. They claimed Najib was misled by Malaysian financier Jho Low and other 1MDB officials into believing that the funds in his account were a donation from the Saudi royal family.

Low, whose whereabouts remain unknown, has denied wrongdoing.

About 50 supporters of the former prime minister travelled to Putrajaya, some wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the word 'bosku' (my boss). Protesting Najib's innocence they said he was being "persecuted".

"We are not surprised or shocked about the decision," said Rosnah Ila, a businesswoman who was among the small crowd. "This is not a fair justice system, He is persecuted without due evidence. Let justice be done in the eyes of Allah. Those people who have been against Najib will pay a hefty price."

The United States Department of Justice alleges \$4.5bn in government money was drained from 1MDB during Najib's term in office.

The former prime minister received more than \$1bn of the 1MDB funds, according to prosecutors, and faces a total of 42 criminal charges related to the scandal.

Najib is the first Malaysian leader to be found guilty of corruption.

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