

'Anwar best person to ask about Menara Umno'

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By Susan Loone

PKR supremo Anwar Ibrahim is the best person to answer questions regarding Menara Umno, which was issued a special commencement of work order before the building plan was submitted, says Penang Umno chief Zainal Abidin Osman.

"Anwar is most qualified to answer that question as he was the deputy prime minister and Penang Umno chief at that point of time," Zainal said in response to a question at a press conference today.

NONE"He (Anwar) knows everything. We merely inherited this building and at that time, we did not have any positions," he said.

A lightning rod from the top of the Menara Umno building on Jalan Macalister fell after strong winds hit Penang last Thursday.

Two people were killed and several others injured, while several cars were damaged along the busy road.

The weight of the lightning rod created a crater in which Penang hawker Lim Chin Aik, who was driving past in a Honda City, was believed to be trapped.

A five-day search only unearthed parts of his car, and the search for his body was called off yesterday, to prevent safety risks to surrounding buildings.

Yesterday, Tanjong MP Ng Wei Aik claimed that the local council had - on Dec 23, 1995 - issued the building contractor a special permit to commence work, two years before the first building plan was submitted on July 31, 1997. A modified plan was later sent out on July 24, 1998.

He quoted a letter issued by then Chief Minister Koh Tsu Koon to executive councillor Dr Teng Hock Nan to ask why there had been a delay in completing the project, as he had to report the matter to Anwar.

Ng, who is also Penang DAP Socialist Youth secretary, had accused the Gerakan-led government of "succumbing" to Umno's demands.

'Succumbing' to Umno's demands

However, Zainal said Penang Umno has merely been renting the building as the original owner had been the South-East Asia Development Corporation, followed by Amanah Capital, which later bought the building.

In 2005, JKP Sdn Bhd bought the building, and Zainal Osman - then the chairperson - resigned his position in April this year, as he was contesting the 13th general election.

Zainal said the certificate of fitness was issued on July 27, 1998. Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad opened the building on Aug 11 that year.

NONEJust weeks later, on Sept 2 that year, Mahathir sacked Anwar as deputy prime minister.

Zainal also noted that the architect for Menara Umno had won a prestigious Australian award for the design of the building in 1998.

Furthermore, he said, the architect had called in a wind consultant to ensure that the building and its structures could withstand strong winds.

"We feel lucky that we have managed to contact the original architect, who will be preparing a report on the building," said Zainal.

"We urge all quarters not to politicise the issue but to wait for the official report, so that further action can be taken. We hope people will be patient until then."

Asked to comment on the building audit requested by the Penang Municipal Council, which has not been submitted by the building management since 2011, Zainal said the matter was being looked into.

"We are also asking the same question. We are checking the records. If there is any negligence by any quarters, they must take responsibility. We are conducting an internal inquiry and we will take the necessary actions," he said.

Penang Umno then handed over RM5,000 to Chin Aik's wife, Lim Chai Song.

Zainal expressed his sympathies and offered the party's condolences to the victim's family.

