

Mara boss: PM signed off on property deal

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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak had approved Mara's purchase of a property in Australia, which was bought at an allegedly inflated price.

Mara chairperson Annuar Musa said any investment made by Mara had to be approved by the Finance Ministry or the government economic council chaired by Najib.

"It is part of the procedure. It is brought to the Mara council and then to the Rural and Regional Development Ministry before it goes to the Finance Ministry or the economic council," he told reporters at a press conference at the Mara headquarters in Kuala Lumpur today.

However, Annuar (photo) added Mara was not aware of the kickbacks and inflated price for Dudley House as reported by The Age, noting that the purchase was made by a subsidiary firm, Mara Inc Sdn Bhd.

The Australian paper had reported that Mara officials had used government funds to bid up the price for the Melbourne apartment block from A\$17.8 million (RM51.5 million) to A\$22.5 million (RM65 million).

The extra A\$4.75 million (RM13.7 million) was allegedly sent back to Malaysia as kickbacks.

"To the best of our knowledge at that point of time the value was much higher, the value by international valuers was much higher and we bought at a lower value.

"It is not within our knowledge that the value was A\$17.8 million, that will be investigated," Annuar said.

He added that to Mara's knowledge, the purchase had followed procedure.

Shell company

Asked if it was procedure to buy property through a shell company as reported by The Age, he replied in the negative.

"It's not procedure, but probably one of the options. We will look into that," he said.

He also denied that Yusof Gani and Ahmad Azizi, two of three Malaysians implicated in the deal were Mara employees, saying they were just businessmen.

As for Mara Inc chairperson Mohammad Lan Allani (photo) who is also implicated in the

deal, his fate and that of others found to be involved will be decided soon.

"That will be decided by the Mara management soon.

"Mara Inc has seven days to write to us a report, and in two weeks the Mara council will convene for a special meeting," Annuar said.

Annuar said Mara has audited Mara Inc for two months, but declined to reveal why.

"It was an overall (audit), especially about the business process.

"(But our information) was not as detailed as what was reported by The Age," he said, adding that he welcomed its expose.

He did divulge that Dudley House was making money above projections. However he did not have the figures on hand.

He also revealed that Mara Inc has overseas assets worth over RM600 million, which includes a hotel in London.

Annuar has promised full cooperation with the authorities, noting that "no stone will be left unturned.

In Facebook posting later today, Annuar complained about news reports that zoomed in on Najib's role in the deal.

"What is the motive of Malaysiakini and The Malaysian Insider for choosing a headline "Najib luluskan" (Najib approved) when I clearly said the approval was by the economic council.

"This is the procedure that has been set by the government and must be followed. The issue of any individual's approval, including that of Najib's does not arise," he wrote.

During the press conference, Malaysiakini specifically asked the Mara chairperson if the prime minister had to approve the deal before the purchase was made, to which Annuar replied: "Yes, that is part of the procedure."