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1MDB scandal

Malaysia anti-corruption head resigns early after PM probe

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The head of Malaysia's anti-corruption agency, who doggedly investigated prime minister Najib Razak's finances along with the broader scandal around state investment fund 1MDB, is quitting his post early amid intensifying political pressure.

Abu Kassim Mohamed, chief commissioner of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, is due to step down today, more than two years ahead of the scheduled end of his term in December 2018. He will be replaced by Dzulkifli Ahmad, an official in the attorney-general's chambers.

Mr Kassim, who denies that the government has pressed him to stand down, has come under attack from Mr Najib's supporters.

He is among three current or former civil servants against whom a police report was filed last week by an official in Mr Najib's ruling United Malays National Organisation.

According to local media, the police report accuses the three, who also include former central bank governor Zeti Akhtar Aziz and former attorney-general Abdul Gani Patail, of providing confidential information to foreign agencies.

The anti-corruption commission's leadership was praised recently by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation for its "tremendous courage", as US officials announced they were seeking to seize assets allegedly acquired with misappropriated Malaysian state funds.

Mustafa Izzuddin, a political scientist at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, said the Malaysian police report could be construed as a "veiled threat" to anti-graft investigators.

"It is reasonable to suggest that the Malaysian government wants a greater say, and perhaps a tighter hold, on what

information is shared with foreign agencies," he said.

As Malaysia's government has been buffeted by allegations of corruption from overseas probes, Mr Najib has moved to strengthen his position at home. The prime minister sacked a critical deputy prime minister last year and replaced Mr Gani Patail as attorney-general with Mohamed Apandi Ali.

The new attorney-general ruled in January that Mr Najib — who denies any wrongdoing — had no case to answer over \$681m transferred into his personal bank account, ordering the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commis-

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sion to close its investigation into the affair. Mr Dzulkifli, Mr Kassim's MACC replacement, was seated next to the attorney-general at the press conference when Mr Najib was cleared.

The attorney-general also shut down a separate MACC investigation into a 1MDB subsidiary, SRC International. The anti-corruption agency appealed against both decisions.

The pressures on the investigators are an illustration of the tensions over the 1MDB scandal. Under Ms Zeti, who stepped down in April after 16 years, the central bank shone a spotlight on 1MDB's activities, recommending criminal charges over the fund's allegedly inaccurate or incomplete disclosures relating to assets held in the Cayman Islands. 1MDB has denied wrongdoing.

In a recent statement, the MACC said Mr Kassim had applied to end his contract early three times and had not come under pressure "from any party".