

PM: MAHB NOT BEING SOLD TO FOREIGN FIRMS

Khazanah, EPF have boosted ownership to 70pc, says Anwar

QISTINA SALLEHUDDIN
AND NOR AIN MOHAMED RADHI
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim yesterday stressed that Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd (MAHB) was not being sold to foreign companies.

During the prime minister's question time in the Dewan Rakyat, he said the share deal with Global Infrastructure Partners (GIP) through the MAHB consortium had allowed Khazanah Nasional Bhd's and the Employees Provident Fund's ownership to increase from 41 to 70 per cent.

"This is different from the narrative (provided by certain quarters). There is no sale of MAHB to a foreign company," he said.

"Foreign companies own 27 per cent and this is what is being owned by GIP and the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (Adia)."

Anwar said this in response to Datuk Mohd Shahar Abdullah (BN-Paya Besar), who asked for a clarification on the decision by a consortium of government-linked investment companies on the sale of MAHB shares to GIP.

Collectively, Malaysian investors will own 70 per cent of MAHB. Adia and GIP will hold the remaining 30 per cent.

"Is there any sale involving the airports? No. This exercise involves only the management. MAHB is the company that manages the airports, (and) the airports remain the property of the Malaysian government.

"This is similar to how MAHB was permitted by the Turkish government to manage Istanbul Sabiha Gokcen International Airport, where we were given the rights to manage, but ownership remains with the Turkish government," said Anwar.

Anwar also gave his assurance that key management positions, namely that of MAHB chairman and chief executive officer, would be held by Malaysians.

He said of the 145 companies that sought to be part of the consortium that was taking over MAHB, only five were deemed suitable by Khazanah after a strict vetting process.



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim fielding questions in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday. BERNAMA PIC

"The condition agreed upon by Khazanah is the chairman and CEO must be Malaysian. Other companies wanted management rights, and this is why GIP was chosen."

Khazanah last month announced it was leading the Gateway Development Alliance consortium in a conditional voluntary offer to buy all shares in MAHB that it did not own.

Besides GIP, through GIP Aureus Pte Ltd, the consortium's shareholders include EPF and Adia.

However, concerns arose after BlackRock, an American asset management firm with purported pro-Israeli links, acquired GIP.

GIP, however, reiterated that BlackRock was not in any way involved in the transaction related to MAHB's privatisation.

Anwar also gave his assurance that GIP's management would retain full control of the company despite BlackRock acquiring it.

"There was an announcement that BlackRock will take over GIP's interests, but GIP has stated this will not affect its role in managing the airports as this is its expertise and there will be no interference by BlackRock.

"Therefore, issues regarding BlackRock do not arise here."

Anwar said this in response to a supplementary question from Wan Ahmad Fayhsal Wan Ahmad Kamal (PN-Machang), who asked whether Malaysia planned to hand over its airport management to such companies, consequently leading to an economic war.

Anwar said BlackRock's involvement in Malaysia was nothing new as it began in 2021.

"However, we are now attacked, including by those from the opposition, who seem to forget that the decision to involve BlackRock (in Malaysian investments) was made on Feb 25, 2021.

"Pagoh (Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin) was the prime minister then (and the cabinet included) those who are now on that side.

"The decision made then was for EPF to have the world's first and largest syariah private equity direct/co-investment separately managed account fund worth RM2.5 billion managed by BlackRock.

"If you ask me now about the decision (then), I would defend it. I do not want to turn this into a political issue as EPF had probably reported to (Muhyiddin) and the cabinet that (BlackRock) was an investment company only.

"Was BlackRock involved in any pro-Israel sentiment at the time? Yes, it was."

Anwar said the share deal between Khazanah and GIP was not made by the cabinet.

He said the cabinet was only told of the decision after it was made.

"All investments by Permodalan Nasional Bhd, EPF and Khazanah are not matters for the cabinet (to discuss)," he said.

"I also want to emphasise that in the minutes of previous (cabinet) meetings, all of these companies were not discussed by or referred to the cabinet. The same was done when the opposition was in the administration.

"However, I did inform the cabinet afterwards about what had transpired, and news reports saying that we did not know was correct because I only told them after the decision was made."

Previously, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan said the share deal was not a decision made by the cabinet.

Speaking to reporters later, Wan Fayhsal called for the issue to be debated in the Dewan Rakyat.

He voiced his dissatisfaction with Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tan Sri Johari Abdul's decision to reject his emergency motion for a debate. **Additional reporting by Nur Najlaa Mohd Rahmat**

Page 1 pic: Travellers walking past the Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd logo at Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang.