

Now, Mara chairman says Najib opposed Melbourne property buy

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By Diyana Ibrahim

Majlis Amanah Rakyat (Mara) chairman Tan Sri Annuar Musa today said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had opposed its plan to purchase an apartment block in Melbourne, Australia.

In an apparent U-turn from his earlier statement, Annuar said Mara had been forced to appeal Najib's decision, and the purchase was eventually given the green light by the Economic Council (EC).

"During that day (of the press conference), someone twisted it and said the prime minister approved it. Actually, he did not approve it, and this was written in a May 10 letter.

"The Finance Ministry informed that the prime minister had not given his approval for the purchase, so the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development and Mara appealed this.

"It was brought to the EC, and since the Bank Negara and Economics minister was there, the discussions were more broad and the decision was made there," he told reporters at the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) office in Putrajaya.

On Wednesday at a press conference on Mara's purchase of the Melbourne property, Annuar was asked about the approval process and had said that the EC, which is chaired by Najib, would go through purchase proposals.

He added however that the decision to buy the property was made by the council as a whole and the question of individual approval by Najib did not arise.

Annuar today said that Mara intended to appoint an international auditing firm to come up with a report on its accounts instead of relying on an internal audit.

He said the proposal for an international auditor would be raised at a meeting of the Mara council on July 1.

"We will appoint an international auditor so that reports on our accounts will be credible. Even though the MACC is also investigating, we want to look at things from the accounting perspective.

"It may not involve a criminal act or element of corruption, but we can take the opportunity to set standards for future reference. Hence we want an international audit to be done," he said.

Annuar added that an interim report on the purchase of Dudley International House in Melbourne, which is now under scrutiny, had been completed by Mara's internal

auditors.

Annuar said on Wednesday that prior to the expose by Australian media about alleged corruption in the purchase, Mara had already embarked on an internal investigation two months ago.

When asked about the status of the senior Mara official who was allegedly involved, Annuar said such a matter was out of his jurisdiction.

"That is for the ministerial level to handle. However, I will discuss it at the meeting of the council. It is important to gather the facts first or we could face legal action," he said.

Australian paper The Age reported that a "top" Mara officer, senior official and former politician had allegedly spent millions of government funds to buy an apartment block in Melbourne in a property scam.

In the exclusive report, The Age said that "a group of super-rich Malaysian officials" overpaid by A\$4.75 million (RM13.8 million) for an apartment block in the city in 2013.

The trio had allegedly "overbid" for the building, from A\$17.8 million to A\$22.5 million (RM65.3 million), with the difference pocketed as bribes back home.

Australian developers of the property received sham invoices for fake services, such as "consultancy and advisory", from Malaysian firms, the paper said. – June 26, 2015.

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