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Decisions process involving family members explained

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday said he had no part in decisions on corporate moves involving his son.

"This is consistent with the practice by the Government that a member of the Government cannot take part in deliberations involving a member of his family," he told the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was responding to a supplementary question by Mr Lim Guan Eng (DAP-Kota Melaka) who sought clarification on the rationale behind the deal between Malaysian International Shipping Corp and Petronas to purchase stakes in Konsortium Perkapalan Bhd (KPB).

"Everybody had mentioned that this (deal) involved my son. According to Government's practice, if there is any link with his family matters, the person (member of the administration) cannot take part in any of the discussions," he added.

For this reason, Dr Mahathir said he was not responsible for the decision-making process that would involve his son.

"If the Cabinet holds such discussion, he (the government member) has to leave the Cabinet meeting. The person has no right to give his views.

"On a number of occasions, I had to leave the Cabinet meeting as there were matters discussed which were said to pertain to my family.

"And I was not at all offended because that has been our normal practice. And I had no idea what transpired (in the Cabinet meeting) and was not bothered to know," he added.

Viewing from one perspective, Dr Mahathir said the son of a prime minister cannot be in the Government service as there will be charges that the Government leader is seeking to give a place to his son in the Government.

Similarly, he said the prime minister's son cannot take an active role in politics as there will be allegations that his son is being groomed to take over as his successor.

At this juncture, the House roared with laughter when Dr Mahathir made a veiled reference to Lim Kit Siang and his son, Guan Eng (DAP secretary-general and deputy party secretary, respectively), saying "still there are some people who will provide seats to their sons to take over."

To make his point, Dr Mahathir said that in the last general elections there were delegations who had approached him to nominate his (Dr Mahathir's) son as a candidate.

"But I said no because he (Dr Mahathir's son) is not qualified now ... when I step down, then if you want to pick my son as a candidate, you can do so," he added.

To a supplementary question by Mr Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Tanjong), the Prime Minister said companies involved in current mergers and acquisitions were solid and strong, and were highly profitable before the currency and stock market problems cropped up.

"Take any company for that matter, if the currency depreciates and their share value plunges sharply, obviously they'll face problems."

Dr Mahathir said if the companies were left to deal with the problems without Government's assistance, the Government too would suffer losses.

He added that there is a tendency to parrot terms used by others such as bail-outs and "mega" projects although these projects are essential for the nation's future economic development.

For example, he said, the KL International Airport in Sepang, covering

25,000 acres is very much cheaper than the Hong Kong airport which is smaller in size.

"It is for future preparation. To get land for the development of the airport is not easy. That is why we have allocated 25,000 acres but we are not using all of it.

"When we build an airport, we need to plan out for the year 2050 or 2100. If in the future we need an airport, there is space. Our expenditure will also not be that big.

"The cost to build Hong Kong airport is US\$20 billion (US\$1 = RM3.63). Sepang airport is not even US\$3 billion, one tenth of the cost of Hong Kong airport, but the size of Sepang airport is bigger. Our expenditure is not that big," he added.

Earlier, the Prime Minister had responded to the original question by Lim Kit Siang who wanted to know the legal powers and jurisdiction of the National Economic Action Council vis-a-vis the Cabinet and Parliament as well as its modus operandi.

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