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Parliament-son

MAHATHIR SAYS HE'S NOT INVOLVED IN SALE OF SON'S SHIPPING LINE

KUALA LUMPUR, March 24 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today categorically denied in the Dewan Rakyat that he was involved in negotiations for the sale of Konsortium Perkapalan Berhad (KPB), headed by his son, to Malaysia International Shipping Corporation (MISC).

"Everyone is talking about my son being involved. But in this matter I'm sorry to say that it is a government practice that a government member cannot take part in discussions involving a member of his family. As such I have no part in the matter and am not responsible for it," he said replying to a supplementary question from Lim Guan Eng (DAP-Kota Melaka).

During question time Lim asked whether the sale of KPB shares to MISC was to bail out KPB which is linked to the prime minister's son, Mirzan who is KPB chairman.

Dr Mahathir said it was a practice in the government that a member of the administration has no right to voice opinions during discussions involving a member of his family.

"If the cabinet holds such discussion, he (the government member) has to leave the cabinet meeting... and on several occasions I have been chased out of the cabinet because the matters discussed are said to pertain to my family," he said.

"And I'm not at all slighted because that is our practice and I have no idea what transpires and would not bother to know. Of course people would say we would secure a place for a prime minister's son who joins the government or when he enters politics, the son is being groomed to be our successor," he said.

"There are also people who provide their sons seats to take their place," he said cynically while glancing at Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Tanjong) and son Lim Guan Eng.

Dr Mahathir said that for the last general election delegations had approached him to nominate his son as a candidate.

"But I said no. Not until I've quit the scene. Only then they can," he said.

To a supplementary question from Lim Kit Siang, who claimed that the government's acquisition of shares of bankrupt companies were "bail-outs", the prime minister said:"In fact there's no "bailout"..these companies are solid, non-problematic and profitable companies before the plunge in currency and share values.

"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.

"We're responsible to our citizens. We must bear in mind that if these companies don't earn profits and the government in turn depends on levy on corporate profits for revenue, then who loses," he said.

On opposition claims that the government had yet to convince the people that the economy was recovering, Dr Mahathir said efforts towards that end have been implemented and were beginning to show results though not yet substantial.

"We make efforts to convince all parties within and outside the country of the nation's sound economy but they, like the opposition, are not convinced by whatever our explanation...because they shut out their hearts

to it," he said.

Dr Mahathir also expressed fear that if he declared that the economy has fully recovered there would be fresh pressures on the ringgit.

"We don't have the freedom of expression now. If we say something that we don't like, they'll go all out to bring down the value of our currency.

"The opposition, on the other hand, can say whatever they like and still don't get detained under the ISA. I could have used my powers to invoke the ISA but I did not," he said to the thunderous table-tapping by government back-benchers.

On the opposition blaming government's mega projects as having contributed to the country's current economic problems, the prime minister said: "We don't have mega projects... when others say we have mega projects, like parrots we too repeat after them."

Citing the brand new RM9-billion Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) in Sepang, Dr Mahathir said it was built to cater for increasing passenger traffic.

"We build the KLIA for the future. It is stupid of the government not to plan ahead. When we built the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang, it was to cater for 400,000 passengers a year but that airport now has to handle 16 million passengers a year," he said.

As for the RM2-billion Pernas Twin-Towers, he said, it would have cost US\$10 billion if it were to be built in Japan and that Malaysians should be thankful that the country is free of earthquakes or volcanic eruptions.--

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