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PM: I had no part in decisions involving son

gh; Azrani Rustam

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

This is consistent with Government practice when it concerns discussions involving family members of Government leaders.

Referring to a supplementary question in the Dewan Rakyat from Lim Guan Eng (DAP-Kota Melaka) who, among other things, had questioned the rationale of the sale of "boats" in the deal involving Petronas, MISC and Konsortium Perkapalan Bhd, Dr Mahathir said everybody had linked this to the fact that it involved his son.

"In Government practice, if there is any link with matters involving his family, the person (member of the administration) cannot take part in any discussions," Dr Mahathir said.

"He will have to leave the Cabinet meeting if it involves Cabinet deliberations ..."

He said there were occasions when he had to leave the Cabinet meeting as there were reportedly matters discussed concerning his family.

"I did not in any way feel slighted, as that is the practice.

"And I did not know what transpired (in the Cabinet meeting)," the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir's son Mirzan is chairman of Konsortium Perkapalan Bhd which is forging a deal with Malaysian International Shipping Corporation to sell Konsortium's shipping subsidiaries Pacific Basin Bulk Shipping Ltd and PNSL Bhd.

Dr Mahathir spoke for 50 minutes on the functions of the National Economic Action Council, the slight recovery of the economy, and contributions of big businesses to the economy.

The Prime Minister also explained why the recent corporate deals did not amount to a bail-out and that companies involved were strong and were only facing problems because of the economic problems.

The first supplementary question came from Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Tanjung) who had asked the original oral question on the powers of the NEAC.

Providing more insights into the situation facing "the son of a Prime Minister", Dr Mahathir said seen from one perspective, the son was not supposed to be in Government service as this would lead to charges of the Government leader seeking to give a place to his son in the Government.

Similarly, the Prime Minister's son could not play an active role in politics as there would be allegations that the leader was grooming his son to take over.

Neither can the son be a businessman as it would trigger allegations of favours.

The House roared with laughter when Dr Mahathir made a veiled reference to Kit Siang and his son, Guan Eng (DAP secretary-general and deputy party secretary respectively), saying "still some people give a place to his son to take over".

Dr Mahathir said just before the last general election, there was a delegation which wanted to name his son as a candidate.

"I said "No, he is not qualified.

"When I step down, if you want to pick my son as a candidate, you can do so."

Kit Siang had in his supplementary question, raised the issue of

confidence which, he said, remained a major problem.

He referred to the "Renong, UEM incidents and what is seen as five bail-outs", saying they had affected confidence.

The Prime Minister made it clear that there was no bail-out.

He said the companies involved in recent corporate deals were strong ones which made substantial profits before the economic problems cropped up.

Some 28 per cent of their profits went to the Government.

In a reply which contained some light-hearted remarks - like Dr Mahathir's fear of a contagion of ills from the Opposition benches when discussing the economic's contagion effect - the Prime Minister said there was a tendency to parrot terms used by others.

These included "bail-out" and "mega projects" although these projects were essential for the nation's economic development.

He said the KLIA covering 10,000 hectares were very much cheaper - slightly over US\$2 billion (RM7.2 billion) - than the US\$20 billion Hong Kong airport although the latter covered a smaller area.

Dr Mahathir said he had in 1964 attended the opening of the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International Airport which was meant to accommodate 400,000 passengers a year.

"In the end, the number soared to 16 million passengers," Dr Mahathir said.

For the new airport, therefore, a higher projection was needed "because we are building an airport for the future, for the year 2050 or even 2100", the Prime Minister said.

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