

Gov't should sell MAS, says minister

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By Aidila Razak

The government should get out of the aviation industry by selling Malaysia Airlines, said Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Idris Jala today.

Idris, who was once chief executive officer of MAS, however, cautioned against selling the company for too cheap a price.

"We should sell it, but we should not sell it at a loss.. .because public money is involved and it is a public-listed company. There should be no fire sale," he said.

Idris, who is now in charge of the Performance and Delivery Management Unit (Pemandu), said that now is a bad time to sell as MAS shares are hovering at about RM0.30 per share.

He said a better time to sell was when he was CEO of MAS as the share prices had then doubled from about RM3 when he first joined to about RM6 by the time he left.

"Over time, the Malaysian government should get rid of stakes in (industries) where it should not be involved in," he said.

Speaking at the Pemandu-organised Global Malaysia Series, he said that these industries include strategic ones like defence and infrastructure construction or in technologies which require long gestation periods.

Colourblind policies

Meanwhile, to a question from the floor, he said despite the tension over the proposed dismantling of the New Economic Policy, the government is already implementing colourblind policies.

He said that this can be seen through the assistance provided to the hardcore poor, scholarships for all students who obtained 9As in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia and the Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia.

"We are moving away from association with race...to needs basis. The needs-based policy and recognition of merit is already in practice.

"In Malaysia, at policy level, there is a lot of 'aggro' (aggravation) in discussions

alone. It is better to just do it, rather than be vortexed by the discussions," he said.

Most Malaysians, he said, are actually fine with needs-based affirmative action once it is in practice.

This, he said, included bumiputera rights pressure group Perkasa chief Ibrahim Ali, who came to see him in 2011 to raise concerns about the matter.

"He felt Pemandu was not looking at the needs of the bumiputera. I said, if people need it, bumiputera or not, we provide help.

"He agreed that Indians and Chinese families who are hardcore poor should get government help. He agrees too, only at policy level we have a lot of aggro we could do without," he said.

Idris said that fighting among ourselves over the domestic market, or even government contracts is "old school" and that Malaysians should look beyond Malaysian shores.

Only then, he said, can the economy move from being stuck in middle income, to high income.

"Malaysians need to wake up. If we want to be beyond 'jaguh kampung', we need to be more global," he said.

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