

'No more approval for direct negotiated contracts'

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The Finance Ministry is no longer approving direct negotiated procurement contracts unless they are properly justified by the relevant departments, Deputy Finance Minister Awang Adek Hussin says.

Awang Adek, who sits on the ministry's tender committee, said this practice has been ongoing since Prime Minister Najib Razak took office in 2009.

"This is new. Even bumiputera contractors must compete if they want any contract," he said at a forum on the 10th Malaysia Plan: Policy, Politics and the NEM at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang yesterday.

"The bumiputera are complaining now, the same as politicians who complain that there is no point for them to join politics because they cannot get any projects," he added, drawing laughter from the 100-odd participants at the event organised by the Centre for Policy Research and International Studies.

penang usm forum 280710 awang adek hussin However, Awang Adek (left), who is a BN appointed senator, said it was not the government's policy to withdraw business contracts that had been signed.

"We pride ourselves in being a democratic country, open, transparent, so do we want to take away contracts we have signed?" he queried. "Do you want Malaysia to be known throughout the world as a country that can take back contracts that have been signed?"

He was referring to Opposition leader and PKR supremo Anwar Ibrahim's recent call for subsidies to the Association of Independent Power Producers (IPPs) be halted before withdrawing subsidies for the rakyat, which had resulted in the current hike in prices of essential goods.

Awang Adek questioned why the issue of ethnicity was raised with regard to the IPPs, as most of them were not from the bumiputera community.

His response came following the speech by Centre for Policy Initiatives director Lim Teck Ghee. Awang Adek remarked that Lim said "nothing positive to say, and everything seems bad in Malaysia".

30 years of lacklustre performance

Lim in his analysis said the country's performance in the region had been lacklustre for the last 30 years, placing it on par with poorer countries like Cambodia and Laos, instead of better ones such as Singapore.

NONE Lim (right) also said the government should not justify the recent dip of 81 percent in foreign direct investment by blaming it on the world's problems but should instead to reinvent itself to keep the country competitive in the global market.

He also touched on transparency in government procurements and emphasised the need to treat all citizens as equals as "we are all in the same boat".

However, Awang Adek called for "more realistic" arguments as Malaysia was a multiracial country with a 67 percent bumiputera population.

He said the concepts of new world order, new politics and new media may have seen governments collapse in countries like Japan and Indonesia because they have a homogenous society.

"But it does not mean it will work in Malaysia. Don't simply think we can say whatever we like. At the end of the day, we are the ones who will suffer... we who do not vote with our feet but are going to stay here. We want to see something happening to Malaysia," he said.

"That is why I tend to worry now. At the rate things are going, there are more and more questions on what the bumiputera gets, for example the seven percent price difference for property and the scholarships."

Plea for a 'fair assessment'

Awang Adek pleaded for a fair assessment of the situation in the country as things were changing, for example, students with 9A+ can now obtain government scholarships, regardless of race.

"Things are changing... please be fair, do not ridicule our efforts," he added.

In an immediate response, Lim said he was not being 'hypercritical' as he does support the NEM's lofty targets.

He said he was aware of the difficulties and sensitivities that stood in the way of the NEM and 10MP being handled correctly.

"I appreciate the pressure that politicians on both sides of the divide are in when speaking about this. Academicians tend to be more independent about freedom of expression, more than what is desirable," Lim said.

"We should all collectively monitor the 10MP and NEM, and provide feedback on whether it is going the right way or not. I have given some ideas on where it could go wrong.

"I am quite prepared two years from now to eat my words when the plan is reviewed, and even apologise if I had been overly critical".

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