

Dr M: Private sector only wants money
Malaysiakini.com
November 01, 2010

The government may be all set to hand over the economy to the private sector, but former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad has his reservations.

Asked his views on the private sector-led Economic Transformation Programme today, he said it should not be left entirely to the private sector, since the sector was only interested in making money.

"The market is about making money, (the private sector) is not interested in regulating itself. The sector will find ways to get around the restraining effects of the market.

"Unless the government oversees this and limits the ability to abuse, then of course we will have the type of crisis we are experiencing," he said.

NONEMahathir (left) was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the first World International Conference on Riba, which attracted about 200 delegates, including a representative of the Nigerian council of traditional rulers.

While his 22 years as prime minister saw a heavy push for privatisation, the underlying approach was still one of "government knows best", with the government championing some sectors over others.

Some of the ventures during Mahathir's tenure, such as the steel project, saw negative results.

In contrast, current premier Najib Abdul Razak had boldly announced that "the days of government knows best are over", and has introduced reforms to ease restrictions for business in Malaysia in an attempt to spur the nation to a high-income status.

'They will kill you if you stop using US dollar'

The elder statesman's disdain for proponents of the free market was also reflected as he declared the capitalist United States a "bankrupt" nation.

Denouncing the US currency as "toilet paper", Mahathir said the currency actually had no value as the US did not keep any reserves in the form of gold or foreign currency.

"They have no money. They are in fact bankrupt. We have reserves to back our ringgit, we have more than RM300 million to back our currency," he said.

Instead of using the US dollar as the currency of trade, Mahathir suggested the use of gold dinar.

However, his proposal has not been taken up by other Muslim countries, due to "fear that if (they) use currencies other than dollar, the US will become bankrupt".

"The US may take the kind of action (it is) fond of, by invading your country... If (you try to use another currency) instead of the US dollar for trade, it will kill you," he said.

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