

Mirzan defends stand after economist quits

• **By Shamini Darshni**
darshni@nst.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: The fallout over "Asli's controversial report on Bumiputera equity ownership continued yesterday when its stalwart economist resigned in protest.

Dr Lim Teck Ghee said he could not accept the backdown by Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli) president Mirzan Mahathir over the think-tank's findings that the estimated Bumiputera equity ownership in public-listed companies may be as much as 45 per cent.

Mirzan said on Tuesday that the study was based on flawed assumptions and calculations and added that its conclusions could not be "vigorously justified".

His comments came in the midst of a heated debate between the government and

politicians on one side and Asli.

The Economic Planning Unit says that its more exhaustive study showed that Bumiputera corporate entity ownership was at 18.9 per cent.

In a statement, Lim said that as the director of the Centre for Public Policy Studies, he stood by the findings of the study.

"Since I cannot agree with Mirzan's statement, and because of the need to defend the position and integrity of independent and non-partisan scholarship, I regret to inform that I will be stepping down," he said.

Lim hoped that the public space opened by the centre's work on this and other issues will be expanded.

"It is the fundamental right of the Malaysian public to question all government statistics and policies, more so



Lim feels public can question all government statistics

when these are not transparent or defensible," he said.

Mirzan yesterday stood by his statement that the

methodology used in the study was flawed. He also said that he was reflecting Asli's position on the matter.

"As president, I am able to take a stand. In the past, I have given speeches as Asli president and nobody questioned me then."

Lim's resignation was entirely up to him, he added.

"I think it is better for people to do things based on principle rather than on any other agenda," he said.

Critics of the study argued that the think-tank based its findings on 1,000 companies listed on Bursa, Malaysia, unlike the EPU which studied 600,000 Malaysian companies and used government documents.

They also rejected Asli's argument that government-linked companies (GLCs) were, in effect, Bumiputera companies as the gov-

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ernment owned them.

Mirzan explained that the ownership of GLCs would depend on various factors, including investments, capital and profits.

"For example, if Khazanah Nasional Bhd was to declare dividends, it would go to the government, which would then go to a consolidated fund for all Malaysians. This makes it impossible to segregate the fund for each ethnic group," he said.

Asked whether he was agreeing with EPU's methodology, Mirzan said while he did not know what methodology the unit used, "all methods are at best good estimates of the situation".

Asli director Tan Sri Ramon Navaramam said he was disappointed with Lim's resignation.

"He is a good scholar who is very well respected in the aca-

demie world and it would be a loss. I asked him not to resign but continue to seek the truth through his research.

"I hope his resignation will not discourage other researchers from pursuing the truth to enrich the government's capacity to choose better policy options and to strengthen the quality of decision-making," he said.

Navaratnam said that in all research undertakings, there were weaknesses because of insufficient data.

"But we are hoping to work closely with the EPU and other agencies to get the data and improve the methodology.

"This is necessary, both for their methodology and ours so we can update it and make it more relevant and substantially change the economic structure which has been in place since the 1970s," he added.