

Sort yourselves out, Shahrir tells parties in Asli fallout

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KUALA LUMPUR: The two bodies at loggerheads over the actual amount of Bumiputera equity ownership should sit together and explain how they reached their respective conclusions.

"The statistics have to be accurate so the government policies and strategies will also be the right ones," said Member of Parliament for Johor Baru Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad.

Shahrir was commenting on the controversy following the initial statement by Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli) that Bumiputera equity ownership stood at 45 per cent.

But on Tuesday, Asli president Mirzan Mahathir said the study was based on flawed assumptions and calculations and added that its conclusions couldn't be "vigorously justified".

His comments came in the midst of a heated debate between the government and politicians on one side and Asli on the other.

The Economic Planning Unit had said that its more exhaustive study showed that Bumiputera corporate entity ownership was at 18.9 per cent, which fell short of the 30 per cent government target.

"They should have sorted themselves out a long time ago instead of getting into a public debate and get-

ting everybody upset," Shahrir said.

He said the statistics must be credible as they were used as a basis to form government policies.

He said that if the centre's figure of 45 per cent had included government-linked companies, then it was a matter of definition.

What concerned the Malays, he said, and the current leadership,

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were "leakages" that had been occurring since 1990.

"Everyone has seen that there were parties who were beneficiaries of government policies, strategies and decisions in the name of the new National Economic Policy. Yet, at the end of the day, the beneficiaries could not hold on to their gains."

The concern should be on how to

prevent the leakages now that the NEP was back in the picture. To do this, the statistical information had to be accurate, he said.

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Shahrir said that the present focus should be on reducing the leakages and openly tendering government contracts while cutting down on direct negotiations to ensure competition for a more effective economic system.

"If we miss the point and talk about whose statistics are correct, we may miss the whole thing," he said.

Asked whether he thought it was right for the director of the Centre for Public Policy Studies Dr Lim Teck Ghee to quit his post, Shahrir replied: "If he feels very strongly about it, he should quit but why must he quit at the end of the month? If it's a matter of principle, then you quit immediately, like me. But he may have his reasons."

Asli's stalwart economist had announced on Wednesday that he was quitting as he could not accept the backdown by Mirzan.

Shahrir said that while people should stand by their decisions and take responsibility for their opinions, he did not think that Lim's decision to quit would resolve the situation.