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Salleh: Dr M's claims inaccurate, sensationalised

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REBUTTAL: Minister says ex-premier's blog post filled with half-truths

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THE issues raised by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad are not only inaccurate, but also sensationalised in a regular Umno members, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak said.

In a lengthy article yesterday, Salleh also described the former premier's latest blog post as being filled with "recycled issues" and "half-truths".

"All this is being done to influence the sentiments and emotions of Umno members to go against the prime minister and his leadership.

"It is sad when Dr Mahathir is willing to throw around accusations for the sake of removing the prime minister and to set up a 'Council of Elders' that will control his puppet prime minister," Salleh said.

On Monday, former premier Dr Mahathir published an article entitled 'An Open Letter to Umno Members and Grassroots Leaders'.

Dr Mahathir had said he penned the letter following "restrictions" that prevented him from meeting party members in person.

He had claimed that Umno was "owned" by party president Datuk

Seri Najib Razak and that the IMalaysia slogan advocated by Najib was too similar to "Malaysian Malaysia".

Salleh, however, rebutted Dr Mahathir, saying: "The biggest difference between 'Malaysian Malaysia' and IMalaysia is that the second concept accepts the Federal Constitution as a whole, especially the provisions under Section 153.

"If IMalaysia is exactly the same with 'Malaysian Malaysia', then we would not have the Bumiputera Economic Empowerment Council, the Bumiputera Agenda Steering Unit, the New Economic Model and many others."

On Dr Mahathir's claim that "former colonisers" were being appointed as advisers to the government, Salleh said it was common practice in many countries to hire foreign advisers.

"They only offer advice. They're not administrators. The truth is this nation is run by locals, not outsiders.

"The prime minister has many people advising him. What can "outside negotiators" possibly contribute when there are so many locals advising today's administration? Why is Dr Mahathir using the word "coloniser" when it does not reflect reality?" he asked.

Dr Mahathir also claimed that the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (Pemandu) was meant to replace the Economic Planning Unit (EPU).

To this, Salleh retorted: "The prime minister had set up Pemandu as a body that supervises transformation programmes that involve

improving the economy and governance.

"Of course, these two matters do not fall under the EPU's purview as it is an economic body. Contrary to Dr Mahathir's claim, the prime minister places great trust in the EPU. He even appointed a capable person to helm EPU."

Salleh brushed aside Dr Mahathir's claim that the country was under Singapore's behest, saying the government was "brave enough" to confront the island nation on certain issues.

"Dr Mahathir used the crooked bridge issue to make his conclusion. But, there is no question of whether we have enough courage to oppose Singapore. The crooked bridge was not built because Malaysia was committed towards honouring its agreements (with Singapore).

"Had the bridge been built, Singapore's real estate rights would have been breached under international law," Salleh said.

He also questioned Dr Mahathir's criticism against government-linked companies (GLCs) that borrowed "billions of ringgit" to make investments overseas.

"Malaysian sovereign wealth fund Khazanah Nasional Bhd, Permodalan Nasional Bhd and other GLCs make local and overseas investments to balance investment risks.

"In fact, overseas investments greatly help the Malaysian economy. The returns we get in United States dollars are much more valuable against the weakening ringgit. So, what is the problem in investing overseas?" Salleh asked.

On Dr Mahathir's claim that strategic development company IMalaysia Development Bhd (IMDB) was set up using huge sums of borrowed money, Salleh called it a lie.

"According to an internationally accredited audit firm last year, IMDB's investments were accounted for. If IMDB was heavily in debt, it would have gone bankrupt. On the contrary, IMDB's debts have gone down tremendously."

Salleh said Dr Mahathir's claim that IMDB had purchased pieces of land at lower prices, and then sold them to government institutions at much higher prices, was half true.

"The fact is that lands are sold cheaply to IMDB as it is wholly owned by the Finance Ministry. Unlike other GLCs, IMDB is not given monetary funds but rather plots of land.

"The government institutions that purchased these lands are not 100 per cent owned by the Finance Ministry. IMDB cannot sell these lands cheaply as this would benefit third parties and not the government."

Salleh also rebutted Dr Mahathir's claims that the prime minister had received a RM2.6 billion donation from the Middle East.

"This money is within the knowledge of the Umno secretary-general and treasurer. I notice that Dr Mahathir no longer claims that the RM2.6 billion comes from IMDB after the claim was proven to be false."

Salleh also denied Dr Mahathir's claim that Najib had removed former Attorney-General Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail and dissolved the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) to

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