

## **Should top royalty be in business?**

**Kinibiz.com**

**June 13, 2014**

**By Khairul Khalid**

The recent clamour over the Sultan's executive role in Johor's state administration has also opened another pertinent debate – the monarchy's increasing participation in business.

There are two popular local phrases that often go hand-in-hand – “cari makan” and “what to do”. They basically mean “I'm only trying to earn a living; what am I supposed to do?”

For example, a man is so occupied at work that he forgets an important birthday. His sour-faced wife waits at the doorway. The man wrings his hands and says, “Cari makan sayang, what to do?”

Or a working single mother comes back late from the office to find a frowning, hungry daughter. “Cari makan baby, what to do?”

Or at the other extreme, a businessman offers illegal inducements to secure a deal or a contract. His partner stares at him angrily. The businessman just shrugs, “Cari makan brother, what to do?”

And the list goes on. These are some of the common everyday situations we face daily as we strive to earn a decent living and provide for our families. Some even have to take up additional jobs or run small businesses for extra income to make ends meet.

This is why common Malaysians are often more than surprised when they hear about Sultans and royalty involved in business.

Aren't they already extremely wealthy? Aren't their basic needs already well provided for by the government? What chance do I have in competing against them in business? The Sultan shouldn't need to “cari makan” like us normal citizens, should they? Shouldn't they be above all that?

These would be some of the usual typical man-on-the-street reactions.

Of course, questioning the monarchy in Malaysia is always a tricky business, no matter how good your intentions are. It is always seen as suicidal for a mere wage-earning mortal to publicly express any reservations about a Sultan's motives.

However, recent events in Johor have opened a window of opportunity to engage in fresh debate. A new housing Bill, controversially proposed to give the Sultan unprecedented executive powers, met with ferocious resistance from both ruling and opposition parties.

Other than the issue of the Sultan's executive powers, it has highlighted the need to address the related matter of the monarchy and their involvement in business.

It is not uncommon to hear of royalty being on the boards of local companies and using proxies but the Sultan of Johor has been openly and aggressively expanding his business empire.

I am no constitutional expert but let's hear it from chief royal critic, former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad.

"The rulers are to be paid handsome pensions and may not be involved in business. This was considered necessary because officers tend to defer to the wishes of rulers and would find difficulty in rejecting business propositions by them. There was also the belief that unscrupulous businessmen would make use of the Sultans to get an advantage over others and to bypass rules and policies," said Mahathir.

The former PM splits opinions like very few other politicians in Malaysian history, but in this matter his views are spot-on.

Simply put, Sultans and their families are already provided with ample remuneration by the state and federal governments to live comfortably and represent the nation that it precludes the need to participate in business.

However, if the monarchs strongly feel that they should be free to do business or "cari makan" or earn a living if they choose to do so, the government needs to clearly redefine the constitutional monarchy's role to suit modern realities.

For example, should the monarchy relinquish their royal privileges or stipends once they are officially in business? Would they be able to resume their ceremonial duties without any conflicts of interest? Would the taxpayers have to pay for the monarch if they are legally challenged in any business disputes?

These are hard questions that need to be answered. There are no easy answers. The constitutional monarchy is part of our historical fabric and it needs to evolve with the times, as in any other legislation.

Of course, some would point out that royalty in businesses is not much different than political patronage in local commerce. True but two wrongs don't make a right.

The tentacles of big commerce are becoming an inescapable part of modern living, and royalty has not proven immune to it. Some serious soul searching about this is required by the rakyat, government and monarchy in order to move forward.

The sooner we realise this the better.

GRRRRR!!!!

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd

Source: <http://www.kinibiz.com/story/tigertalk/90774/should-top-royalty-be-in-business.html>