

'Who becomes PM irrelevant with check and balance'

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Former finance ministry secretary-general says concerns about who would be Malaysia's prime minister are due to the lack of check and balance mechanisms in government.

PETALING JAYA: A prominent former civil servant has emphasised that Malaysians should not unduly worry about who becomes the prime minister if there are strong check and balance mechanisms in place within the government.

Former finance ministry secretary-general Mohd Sheriff Mohd Kassim said today a person who assumes the prime minister's seat is able to repeat the wrongdoings of his predecessors when there is a dearth of "strong" checks and balances.

"Sadly, this (check and balance) is lacking in our country," he said at a forum on controversy-riddled sovereign wealth fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) organised by the Centre to Combat Corruption & Cronyism (C4) here.

Sheriff, who is an adviser to G25 – a group of retired high-ranking civil servants – pointed out that in the United Kingdom an issue like 1MDB would have resulted in an open parliamentary enquiry so that the legislative body there could determine the responsible party, and the attorney-general (AG) could file charges.

He also said the AG's powers should be separated from the executive in acting as the government's lawyer and a public prosecutor.

In recent times, opposition figures and organisations like Transparency International Malaysia have called for the separation of the AG's powers and duties in the interest of transparency and to prevent any conflict of interest.

Some of these calls came after AG Apandi Ali cleared Prime Minister Najib Razak of criminal wrongdoing pertaining to 1MDB, its sister company SRC International and the RM2.6 billion political donation issue.

Sheriff also noted that investors appreciate it when government-owned companies are transparent about their operations.

"Investors are encouraged when they see a strong check and balance system and that governance isn't dependent on personalities but on good structure," he said.

He said there was “marked improvement in foreign investor confidence” in Malaysia when the government introduced financial reforms and major corporations had to implement new standards set by Bank Negara, the Securities Commission and Bursa Malaysia in 2004.

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