

Mirzan: No one put pressure on Asli to back down

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Q: When was this report commissioned? What was the idea behind it?

A: It was the first project for the Centre for Public Policy Studies which aimed to provide recommendations for the Ninth Malaysia Plan. It was submitted in February. It was never meant to be a public document.

Q: Are you convinced that the study is flawed?

A: Absolutely. Categorically, I am convinced. I was away when all this blew up. When I came back, some people wanted to see me regarding corporate equity distribution.

So, I spent two days reading it. I doubt it would stand scrutiny so we decided if we are wrong, we are wrong, we have to admit it.

Q: Why did it take so long for you to realise that the study was flawed? From March until now, that is quite some time.

A: I must admit I was given a copy, but I did not go through it in detail. It slipped past me. If I had, I would have

On Tuesday, the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli) distanced itself from findings of its think tank that Bumiputera equity ownership in public-listed companies may be as much as 45 per cent. Dr Lim Teck Ghee, the head of the think tank, resigned in protest. But so many questions remain unanswered over this episode. **V. VASUDEVAN speaks to Asli president Mirzan Mahathir on the controversial findings.**

queried it. Dr Lim Teck Ghee (Centre director) was convinced it was correct and it was submitted.

When it was brought to my attention, I did not want to rush to make a judgment.

I had to read it and determine if it had any merit. I have to look at the interests of Asli, for Asli has been around for a long time.

Q: Is it not strange that no one in Asli found the findings disputable, even before it became public knowledge?

A: Yes, I know. I don't know how widely it was circulated within Asli.

Q: Were you pressured into questioning the findings of the study?

A: Nobody called me up and said 'Look, you have to back down'. We just felt that we had to look after the interests of Asli.

I spoke to my colleagues and said we had to come up with something. So I worked on it. I read the report, did an assessment and made the decision.

Q: Where did the report go wrong?

A: I feel some of the statements in the report were not substantiated. There was no flow in the report.

A good report would present data that is relevant, and it would have logic. From there, you can come up with conclusions. They followed except that it was not as logical as it should be.

For example, if you say that government-linked companies are considered Bumiputera companies, there should be justification. This is a 20-page report. There is no reference as to why a GLC should be considered a Bumiputera company.

Q: Will Asli conduct this type of study again?

A: Our theme or motto is to try and create a better society. We should not shy away from doing research where the outcome would be useful even in areas which are sensitive.

Q: Has this episode damaged Asli's reputation?

A: What can you do? Damage is dam-

age. The only thing is to limit it and try to come back. To do that, you have to do a better job, basically.

When you are down, it does not mean you are out. You have to work hard to come back. That's what we have to do.

We have to look at changes that need to be made to ensure we have a proper process.