

Muhyiddin: Asli's findings rubbish

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PETALING JAYA: Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin has criticised the study by Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute's (Asli) Centre for Public Policy Studies, which found that bumiputra corporate equity ownership could be as high as 45%, instead of the government's figure of 18.9%.

In an interview with *Mingguan Malaysia* on Sunday, he described the findings of the *Corporate Equity Distribution: Past Trends and Future Policy* report, which was submitted to government in February, as "irresponsible", "rubbish", and one that challenges the government's authority.

"The study is rubbish and is useless. As a Malay, I am also angry and believe that the report has an ulterior motive," he said.

Muhyiddin, who is also the agriculture and agro-based industry minister, said Asli must retract its findings, and acknowledge its mistake to prevent any polemic that could eventually affect racial unity.

"I think the government needs to take serious action. Perhaps the EPU (Economic Planning Unit) or the government's policy unit should ask Asli to justify its figures," he said, adding that the report sought to undermine bumiputra's rights to seek assistance under the New Economic Policy (NEP).

He said if Asli's study states that bumiputra already owned 45% of equity, it meant the government did not need to do anything more to assist the Malay community.

"Instead, if one were to look at the Malay community, there are still many who are poor, including the bumiputras in Sabah and Sarawak, which according to the government, are the most backward.

"We also have to look at the income per capita and the employment opportunities where there are still obvious shortages (for the bumiputra community)," he said.

Muhyiddin also questioned the centre's methodology, noting that when the NEP ended in 1990, official figures showed that Malay corporate equity ownership was only between 19% and 20%.

Since then, he said, there has been a contraction following the closure of bumiputra companies and the sale of their shares.

"So how can Asli say it (bumiputra corporate equity ownership) is expanding?" he asked.

Muhyiddin said it was also wrong for Asli to include government-linked companies (GLCs) in its calculation of bumiputra equity ownership.

"These companies are owned by the government which in turn is elected by the people, which comprises both Malays and non-Malays," he said.

Muhyiddin added that the study would also create the perception that the government was not protecting the interests of non-Malays.

He proposed the formation of a body to be chaired by the prime minister or the deputy prime minister with membership from various quarters to monitor the trend and direction of Malay and non-Malay ownership of every sector.

Twintech Technology International University College vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Ismail Md Salleh said, also in an interview with *Mingguan Malaysia* on Sunday, that while Asli's conclusions were based on a study of only 1,000 companies on the local stock exchange, and included GLCs which are not privately or Malay-owned companies, the EPU's figure was based on 600,000 companies from the Registrar of Companies.

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He added that Malay economic ownership should also not just be limited to equity ownership, but should also consider real estate ownership in the country where

Malays only owned 11% while non-Malays owned 80%.

Ismail said Malays still needed government assistance but

added that the assistance must be restructured as the economy was not the same as in the 1970s.

He added that a time frame for assis-

tance should be determined, after which it should be gradually reduced.

Asli was not interviewed in the *Mingguan Malaysia* articles.

However, in an earlier press release, the centre said its study found the official methodology, inherited from the 1970s, was "narrowly-based" and "unrealistic".

It noted that the government had played an effective role in redistributing wealth more equitably among all Malaysians, but said that selective patronage had resulted in serious "intra-ethnic Malay cleavages, while also undermining inter-ethnic social cohesion and equitable socio-economic development."