

06 MAY 1996

REAX: AZMAN HASHIM LAUDS 7MP'S MOVE TO BUILD AHEAD OF DEMAND

KUALA LUMPUR, May 6 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Association of Merchant Banks Tan Sri Azman Hashim today lauded the government's move in the Seventh Malaysia Plan to undertake infrastructural projects ahead of demand.

"Look at the traffic problem in Kuala Lumpur," he said, referring to present efforts to build the light rail transit system to ease congestion in the city centre.

"Building ahead of demand would be a giant leap forward in our planning and undertaking," he added when asked to comment on the Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996-2000) tabled in Parliament by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir here today.

Asked whether there was a need to overhaul the government's machinery to make the Seventh Plan work better, he said the fact that the leadership was constantly having dialogues with the private sector under the Malaysia Inc concept showed that the civil service was responsive to change.

Adding there was room for improvement, he praised the initiative to improve administrative procedures under the Seventh Plan.

Commenting on the thrust towards a productivity-based growth, he said there was a lot of ground to cover in terms of productivity.

Azman, also chairman of the National Productivity Centre, said there was a need to get more students into the science, engineering and technical streams.

"We have to change in order to move ahead," he said, adding that the stronger emphasis by the government on education and training was a step in the right direction in terms of alleviating the current labour shortage.

Under the full employment situation, students might want to take the easier way out and opt for easier courses since jobs were easy to come by, he said.

As such, he urged the government to attract students into the science, engineering and technical streams to prepare them for the industrial job market.

He added that the private sector could no longer continue the way it had been operating, especially in terms of labour utilisation.

The private sector must take a quantum leap in terms of automation and have people to efficiently run the machines.

Datuk V.K.K. Teagarajan, president of the Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, was glad that the Seventh Plan contained provisions for helping minority races economically.

But he hoped the government could come up with a plan similar to the New Economic Policy to help Indians who had fallen behind economically and were plagued by social problems like gangsterism and drug abuse.

"We hope the Seventh Plan will enable Indians to participate in the economy in a bigger way," he said.

Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry secretary-general Lachman Naraindass said the government, while looking to reduce the number of foreign workers in the country, should not take too drastic a step by undertaking job cuts immediately.

The private sector ought to be given time to make adjustments, he added.

Last week, Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the local business community might have to "bite the bullet" in the face of such challenges.

Education, more training, greater skills acquisition and automation would be the solutions towards overcoming the labour shortage, he said.

Malaysian Chinese Chamber of Commerce (MCCC) deputy honorary secretary-general David Chua said the country's private sector should double efforts to boost the economy by increasing production and product quality while keeping costs low as outlined under the Seventh Plan.

Chua, who described the newly-announced plan as excellent, said that based on the strategies outlined in it, Malaysia would be propelled into the 21st century on a stable footing.

"The Seventh Plan has also aptly outlined the strategies, priorities and shortcomings in the business sector, indicating that the government fully understood the community's needs," he added.

Chua said the private sector would continue to play a major role in the country's economic growth under the 7MP.

Besides business strategies, the plan also outlined appropriate strategies to reduce poverty and reduce the income disparity between the rich and the poor, he added.

On joint ventures between Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera entrepreneurs, he said such cooperation should be further nurtured, especially for small and medium industries (SMIs) who would greatly benefit from such alliances.

"At the same time, it will also help create more Bumiputera entrepreneurs in the future," he added. -- BERNAMA

HAK SHY LDB