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DAP to give Dr M 'full and unstinting support'

THE Democratic Action Party (DAP) said yesterday Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Government will have its "full and unstinting support" to overcome the financial crisis and restore confidence in the economy.

Its secretary general, Mr Lim Kit Siang, told the Dewan Rakyat yesterday the DAP resents any attempt by the US or other nations to interfere in Malaysia's domestic affairs.

Lim cited a cartoon strip in the New Straits Times on October 19 that depicted Uncle Sam making use of the Western media to force Malaysians to change the political leadership with the threat "change your leaders or we will take all your money".

"Whether Mahathir remains as the Prime Minister is a matter strictly to be decided by Malaysians, and it is no business either of the US or any other Western nation to dictate to Malaysia as to who should be the Prime Minister," Lim said when debating the 1998 Budget.

Lim, however, also called for Dr Mahathir to "exercise the fullest restraint in his pronouncements at this delicate stage of trying to restore the confidence of the economy".

He said the crisis should not be used as an excuse for censoring or denying access of foreign mass media reports, however unfavourable to the Malaysian leaders, as there is a need for confidence in the maturity of Malaysians to distinguish between right and wrong, truth and lies.

"In fact, Malaysians should be encouraged to know what the foreign mass media are reporting about Malaysia, to reject what is wrong and untrue but to take serious note of what it is right and true," he said.

Lim said the DAP supports Dr Mahathir's proposal for regulations to govern international currency trading.

He cited the Nobel laureate James Tobin, who had called for a turnover tax on foreign exchange spot transactions to enable national authorities to operate more independent monetary policies, discourage speculative capital fundamentals against short-term speculative activities.

Another Nobel laureate, Mr Lawrence Klein, provided two other options - regional monetary arrangements and the introduction of "circuit-breakers" into the system - a suggestion also made by World Bank's chief economist Joseph Stiglitz.

On the 1998 Budget, Lim thought the Government had missed the opportunity to send out a clear message about belt-tightening measures. Despite the 2 per cent reduction in Government expenditure announced before the Budget, the operating expenditure of RM45.6 billion for next year is still above the 1997 Budget allocation of RM42.7 billion.

He added that Development Estimates 1998 of RM18.5 billion is well above the 1997 budget allocation of RM17.3 billion. Total 1998 Budget of RM64.1 billion is still higher than the total 1997 Budget at RM59.9 billion.

Lim said the increase in passport and driving licence fee was "unfair and unnecessary".

"Such increase in passport fees impose a special hardship on Malaysians who work or study overseas and there should be exemption for persons falling under this category. Similarly, having a vehicle driving licence has become a necessity rather than a luxury, the hefty increase would have an inequitable effect on the poorer strata of the society," he said.

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