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Mahathir-NEAC

NEAC DETERMINES NATIONAL ECONOMIC RECOVERY, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 1 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight the uppermost objective of the proposed National Economic Action Council (NEAC) is to determine Malaysia's recovery from current setbacks affecting the ringgit and the local share market.

The NEAC, to be set up this month, will be empowered by the Cabinet to decide on matters relating to national economy. It is to submit periodic reports to the Cabinet.

Speaking at the Administrative and Diplomatic Service annual dinner at a leading hotel here, Dr Mahathir said national strategies to ward off crippling attacks by currency speculators have already been drawn up in line with the government's priority now to redeem the country's economic resilience.

"May I stress here that our campaign to enhance Malaysia's competitive edge in the world market so that speculative attacks by currency traders have no crippling effects depends very much on attaining all the objectives of the NEAC at the most optimum level," he said.

Last month Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president and Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman announced the formation of the NEAC after a special Umno Supreme Council meeting on Nov 20. The BN Supreme Council, which met the following day, endorsed the proposal.

Dr Mahathir tonight outlined five necessary steps to translate the national strategies for competitiveness in the global market into success.

They are;

- * controlling prices and domestic expenditure through import reduction and minimising wastage of foreign exchange;

- * optimising exports to erase current account deficits and generate trade balance surplus instead;

- * improving productivity and quality to create higher demand and generate greater revenue for Malaysian products;

- * upgrading the people's knowledge and efficiency; and

- * stamping out any form of graft that impedes national advancement.

Dr Mahathir said the people and government would have to jointly chart the course for the country not only to survive but also remain strong in facing up to a world increasingly limiting freedom and observing bias and double-standard laws.

Dr Mahathir said in the past months, Malaysia had undergone tribulations afflicted by oppressive and cruel parties intolerable of the country's comments.

"They decide that our currency should immediately depreciate. They lower the value of our currency and make us poorer each time we say something they don't like to hear.

"Now they threaten our market by reminding us who we depend on for investment and (export) market," he said.

As such, the prime minister said, the civil service, especially the Administrative and Diplomatic service has an important role to determine the success or failure of strategies to be implemented by the NEAC.

The actual date for the NEAC's establishment is expected to be announced soon.

Dr Mahathir said the civil service needed to get a machinery in place to manage and implement all policies and actions planned and agreed to by

the NEAC.

"Whether the NEAC succeed or fail in its operations depends on efficient management by the Administrative and Diplomatic Service," Dr Mahathir said.

He said the establishment of the NEAC and its structure complete with its own computerised operations rooms, which could provide the latest information and figures, would be the Service's responsibility.

"The Service is also responsible for providing the officer assigned to run the NEAC operations room and its affairs. The same applies at the state level," he said.

Dr Mahathir called on the entire civil service to set the example for the people in making sacrifices towards national economic recovery and well-being.

"We must work day and night. Work harder, more productively without grumbling because we don't work merely for the pay but for the country, race and religion.

"If we fail, we can no longer chart and control our own destiny. Other people will be in control and will determine," Dr Mahathir added. --

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