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New measures necessary: Dr M (HL)

Kamarul Yunus; Kang Siew Li

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says the measures announced by the Government last Friday, which includes lowering the projected growth rate for 1998 and cutting back government spending, are necessary to restore confidence in the economy.

"I cannot see how much clearer we can be... certainly we are taking the necessary measures to restore confidence in our economy," he said in Langkawi yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the economic measures at a press conference held at the close of the six-day fourth Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (Lima '97).

"We had decided (on the measures) and (Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar (Ibrahim) made the announcement," he said.

When asked about his meeting with DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang in Langkawi on Saturday, Dr Mahathir said he had explained the idea behind the proposed National Economic Action Council (NEAC) and the problems faced by the country to the Opposition leader.

"I actually spent time explaining what the NEAC is all about and also the problems faced by the country.

"We have to take certain measures which involve sacrifices on the part of everyone. I just wanted DAP to understand that we need to make sacrifices if we want our economy to recover," he added.

On whether the DAP will be offered a role in the NEAC, the Prime Minister said at the moment there are no plans to have representation from DAP or Pas or anyone from the Opposition.

Earlier, a Lima '97 exhibitor from Britain who was also at the press conference, thanked Dr Mahathir for strongly voicing Malaysia's concerns at the International Monetary Fund/World Bank Conference recently.

Technitube Access Engineering director David Pidcock said: "Your (Dr Mahathir) speech in Hong Kong is almost identical to the one made by Winston Churchill in 1932... the problems of Malaysia today are inherited from the UK and the West. Thank you very much for voicing it."

Dr Mahathir thanked the exhibitor, but added that he had not read Churchill's speech.

On complaints that the prices of food and beverages have increased despite the Cabinet's directive that they should not be raised, Dr Mahathir urged the public to lodge complaints to the relevant authorities if they come across any unscrupulous trader doing so.

"I really don't know (about any price increase). We have told them not to increase prices. People should complain."

Alternatively, Dr Mahathir said, the public should avoid outlets which charge high prices.

"Don't buy. There are other places I am sure where the price is right. In this sense, some taxis (drivers) charge more ... you don't have to accept it. There are chartered services and all that."

The Prime Minister, who leaves for Teheran today to attend the Organisation of Islamic Conference, also said he has no special message for the leaders of Islamic countries with regard to strengthening the structure of the organisation.

"Nothing... I do not have any special message. I just want to meet the other heads of governments and discuss the current problems with them."