

23/07/1998

Daim: General thrust to restore confidence

Francis C. Nantha

THE general thrust of various policy measures recently adopted by the Government is to restore business confidence and turn the economy around, Special Functions Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin said yesterday.

"Top of our priority is exchange rate stability and building business confidence, as well as attracting foreign direct investments.

"The result of these measures may not be felt immediately, since monetary and exchange rate policies often take six to 18 months to have full impact.

"However, Malaysia's macroeconomic prospects for 1998 and beyond are also dependent on external factors beyond our control, such as the health of the Japanese economy."

Daim also called for the leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad be accepted without further speculation.

"Now is the time for unity of purpose, all else will have to take a secondary place..." "

On the economic problem, Daim said there was still considerable uncertainty about its depth and duration.

"The severity of Malaysia's economic problem can be made considerably worse if there is irrational pessimism about the future which can prove to be self-fulfilling."

"Whatever name we choose to call it, Malaysia will then be forced to lose its sovereign right for economic and political self-determination. We must avoid this at all costs."

Daim said the Government would provide full support to the media to help it play a proper role in the development of the country.

"In light of the economic situation, we have learnt valuable lessons with regards to the channels of communication with the media and will continue to rectify our past mistakes in handling the media.

"The Government will open two-way channel of communication with the media, reduce the confusion caused by multiple news sources and garner quick responses to misinterpretations or ambiguous statements expressed through the media."

Daim said comprehensive coverage meant reporting the good with the bad, the cause and the effects, but the present coverage of the problem has merely pointed fingers and finding villains to be blamed for the mess - glossing over the hardship faced by the people affected.

He said: "Fair play means an expose of all facets of the Asian economic crisis, and not a one-sided perspective of who or what to blame.

"I am not advocating that you only report heart-warming news or even to publish just our views but to present the debate and that means both sides of the story and argument.

"I am not saying that our ideas are always correct but that they should be given a fair hearing and in-depth critical assessment instead of being brushed off as voodoo economics.

"All too often now, only one side of the argument is given prominence and perhaps more dangerous, sometimes journalistic opinions masquerade as news reporting.

"Instant opinions or analyses are offered and the viewpoints run the gamut from A to B and no further."

He said the media must provide a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues.

"To hear the Press says it, we are all corrupt and all our companies are bankrupt. There is no attempt even at some semblance of balance. It is now all gloom and doom where previously there was only sunshine.

"And yet even in the worst of times, there are successes, he said.

(END)