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`DAP offered no ideas to tackle economic woes'

reports on "Dewan Rakyat" by Alex Choong; Cheah Chor Sooi; Aionn Mohd
OPPOSITION parties should not dispute bold and constructive action taken
by the Government to revive the nation's economy.

Chiding the DAP for not having contributed any constructive idea to ease
the economic woes, Datuk Dr Jamaluddin Mohd Jarjis (BN-Rompin) took the
party to task for "finding fault" with the mechanism set up by the
Government to tackle the problem.

"The party has no other motive except to create negative impressions on
the people on what they term as the Government's wrongdoings.

"In reality, the economic downturn gripping the region has brought about
substantial hardship for the people, including DAP members and supporters.

"Instead of arguing about what is right and wrong, the absolute solution
would be for all of us to remain united," he said during the debate on the
Pengurusan Danaharta Nasional Bhd Bill 1998 at the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

Jamaluddin said contrary to popular perception, the assistance of the
International Monetary Fund had never been the answer to free the country
from its economic problems.

"Has the economy of Korea shown drastic improvement after receiving IMF
aid?

"The Indonesian Government has changed following the pressure by IMF,
but how far has the change improved the country's economy?

"Even the strong critic of the Indonesian Government, Amien Rais, has
praised Malaysia for its refusal to give in to the demands of the
International Monetary Fund," he said.

Jamaluddin reminded the DAP not to incite the people, especially
Employees' Provident Fund contributors over suggestions that the
Government would use the fund money to bail out troubled companies.

"This is very dangerous ... Malaysians have been repeatedly told to
remain united to face the economic problems," he said.

Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang, who declared that he was debating the
Bill "under protest", repeatedly complained that MPs had not been given
adequate time to study the provisions of the proposed legislation as well
as to refer to experts in the respective fields for their comments and
input.

He also said the DAP, PBS and Pas had made a historic protest in the 40-
year-old history of Parliament on Tuesday by boycotting the debate on an
important Bill.

Drawing boos and jeers from Barisan Nasional backbenchers he, however,
reiterated that it was unfair on the part of the Government to push the
Bill through and not give ample time to the MPs to analyse the contents of
the Bill.

At this juncture, Datuk Badruddin Amiruldin (BN-Yan) sought
clarification from Lim, when he said: "Protest-lah ... if a patient is
dying and needs an immediate operation, do we have to wait any longer to
save a life?"

To this Lim replied: "You (Umno) cannot even win the Arau parliamentary
seat."

Badruddin replied: "That is a different story ... you (Lim) cannot even
control your own party."

BN backbenchers then repeatedly shouted "KOKS" (Knock Out Kit Siang) and
this prompted Deputy Speaker Datuk Ong Tee Keat to call for order.

Lim retorted: "This shows the Government is not serious on this matter."

This prompted Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Affifuddin Omar to stand up and seek clarification, saying that there were already precedents of such legislation in the United States and Mexico.

To this Lim said: "We cannot be a `copycat' of other countries."

In reply Affifuddin said: "We are not a `copycat' but we are only adopting the philosophy of such existing legislations to suit our needs."

Lim then told Affifuddin that his argument was "poor".

Affifuddin immediately responded to this and told Lim that he should not play the role of "judge, jury and prosecutor" over his remarks.

He also told Lim that a copy of the Bill was delivered to him last Saturday and there was ample time for him to study the Bill, unless he (Lim) needed input from his so-called experts from the local universities.

Affifuddin said it was important for the Bill to be debated and passed by Parliament because Anwar would be leaving tomorrow for a World Bank meeting in Washington.

"This will give Anwar the competitive edge in his discussions on the question of selling bonds to raise money for the Pengurusan Hartanah Nasional Bhd."

In reply to this Lim said it would not give Anwar a "competitive edge" but a "handicapped edge" if the Bill was rushed through.

Barisan Nasional backbenchers club president Ruhanie Ahmad then sought clarification from Lim when he said:

"Please be reminded that despite the Opposition protest to debate on Tuesday, the DAP had asked the BBC whether Lim be allowed to debate on the Bill today.

"Having further consulted with the Finance Minister, a gentleman's agreement was reached that Lim be allowed to provide a constructive debate."

Replying to this Lim said: "We don't owe anybody anything ... we owe this to the rakyat."

Without further interruptions, Lim continued his speech, which took more than an hour, touching on a wide range of subjects, among which he questioned the appointment of Economic Adviser to the Government and executive director of National Economic Action Council, Tun Daim Zainuddin, as the Minister of Special Functions in the Prime Minister's Department.

The Opposition Leader touched on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's remarks on Tuesday that the Government would borrow and use local funds for the RM16 billion needed to recapitalise local banks.

He quoted Dr Mahathir as saying: "We have quite a lot of savings, for example, the Employees' Provident Fund with monthly contributions of RM1.2 billion."

To this, Lim said: "This must send a warning to the nine million EPF contributors that their RM160 billion EPF funds are in danger of being raided for various SOS operations being planned by the Government

"This is also why the nine million EPF contributors should organise themselves to demand that the EPF develop a new culture of responsibility, accountability and transparency ... not to satisfy anyone's ego or bail out any companies or cronies in Malaysia."

The debate continues today.

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