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PM: Anwar, Daim will work together to tackle woes

Kamarul Yunus; Sreerema Banoo

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is confident that the Government will be able to work effectively in tackling the current economic problems following the appointment of Tun Daim Zainuddin to the Cabinet.

"We have been working together, except that working in the National Economic Action Council (NEAC) is not as effective as working with Daim in the Cabinet," he told newsmen after launching the five-day SMI Showcase '98 and Apec Cross Border Linkages exhibition in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

He dismissed suggestions that Daim's appointment as Minister of Special Functions in the Prime Minister's Department meant that Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had failed to do a good job.

"Both will be able to contribute effectively towards tackling the economic problems," he added.

Dr Mahathir had announced Daim's appointment as a minister, along with the appointment of Tan Sri Kasitah Gaddam as Land and Cooperative Development Minister, on Wednesday.

As Minister of Special Functions, Daim will be responsible for matters relating to economic development.

On the duration of Daim's portfolio, Dr Mahathir said: "At least, until the country's economic problems are resolved."

The Prime Minister also reiterated that Daim's appointment is to facilitate his meetings with government officials, especially ministers, when abroad.

"I have already explained that his (Daim) status is not accepted by foreign countries. We have asking him to discuss with a lot of people outside the country and I found that he cannot gain access to government officials. As such, his effectiveness is much reduced.

"At the same time, there is a need for him to explain policies decided by the NEAC during Cabinet meetings," he said.

Asked on the timing of the announcement, Dr Mahathir said it was made to prevent further speculation.

"It has to be (announced) some time ... if it is another time, you (the press) will link it with something else. (The appointment) is just accidentally or incidentally," he added.

On whether Daim will have to relinquish his post as the Economic Adviser to the Government, Dr Mahathir said: "We have not thought about him (Daim) giving up the post. But, he is now in the Cabinet. So, I think, he can still advise us."

Dr Mahathir said, however, Daim has to relinquish all his business interests, including ownership of Hock Hua Bank.

"Yes, he (Daim) has to. But it will take time to make these arrangements," he added.

On talks that there might be a further reshuffle in the Cabinet, Dr Mahathir said: "Well, you can keep on talking ... I know this (announcement) has caught you all (press) by surprise, didn't it?"

Asked which ministry takes precedence in case of overlapping policies, Dr Mahathir said: "No precedence. The only precedence is the nation. Both will give in, including me, if it is of importance to the nation."

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