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Ghani: Now is the time for prudent management

Thanam Visvanathan

JOHOR BARU, Thurs. - The State Government will not use the currency problem as an excuse to brood, Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman said today.

"Instead, this is a time for us to think through our projects and policies more carefully and in greater detail, to see how we can best weather this situation, without compromising on necessary development projects," he said.

He urged people of Johor to heed the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call to be prepared to make sacrifices in meeting the challenges ahead.

Quoting the Chinese saying, "In times of peace, one plans for war. In times of war, one plans for peace", Ghani said that while the economy was buoyant, many people rushed in to invest in the hope of reaping big profits.

He said that the present challenging times was an "opportunity" for the State Government and the people of Johor to show their mettle.

"We need to take stock of the present situation, and change our attitude accordingly. These adjustments are necessary and important, because the nation's dignity and sovereignty are at stake.

"Only by sacrificing can we avoid compromising our sovereignty the way South Korea and Thailand have done, by opting for a bail-out from the International Monetary Fund."

Ghani said this after addressing a gathering of officers and staff of the Johor civil service at Komplek Islam here today.

He said that for the new year, the State Government would adopt the measures recommended by the Federal Government, such as being more prudent in spending, reducing its reliance on imported goods and working towards increasing exports.

He reiterated that Johor had the advantage of being home to several large export-oriented industries that were among the biggest in the country.

Among them was the production of palm oil, chickens and orchids, and the manufacture of furniture and textiles.

"The State Government will hold regular meetings with members of these industries, to discuss how we can best support them in further increasing productivity and exports.

"We will also emphasise increasing food production, not only by working on idle land, but also by supporting food-based industries, vegetable farmers and producers, and farmers' associations."

He added that the State would not shelve development projects planned for the year.

As an example, he said the State would press on with the redevelopment of the Muar and Pontian districts.

"The only difference is that we will now find ways for more prudent planning, managing and implementation of these projects."

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