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`Good to have US\$ rate a bit lower'

CHAIRMAN of Malaysia Airlines and Technology Resources Industries Bhd, Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli, has welcomed the certainty that comes with the fixing of the ringgit at 3.80 to the US dollar, but said he would prefer to see it below 3.50 if possible.

"The 3.80 level is not good enough and we would like to see it a bit lower," he said in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, adding that "we have put our proposal to the National Economic Action Council".

However, he said there is now certainty, especially in terms of costs, as both his companies purchase items such as equipment and aviation fuel in US dollars.

"Previously, we were not even certain of our costs. If I do not know my costs, how do I even go about pricing my products," he asked.

Tajudin also said Malaysia Airlines' domestically generated revenue now accounts for less than 40 per cent of total revenue, compared with some 60 per cent three years ago.

"Never in our history has in-country revenue been less than 40 per cent."

He said the recent measures introduced by the Government have already resulted in some signs of stability, and the GDP figures for the third quarter of 1998 are not likely to be as low as the 6.8 per cent contraction in the second quarter.

He said every single citizen must be addressed under the economic programme, and the environment must be conducive enough for everyone to participate in the economy.

"Every citizen in this country must have the right to earn a living, and we have got to provide an environment that is conducive for them to earn a good living and not just to ask for charity."

Commenting on the recent events in the country, Tajudin said: "We are completely in support of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir."

His advice to members of the Malay Chamber of Commerce Malaysia, of which he is president, is to concentrate on economics and put aside politics until the economic difficulties are over.

"As far as we are concerned, we must give our full and undivided support to the Prime Minister to make sure we get rid of these economic difficulties without any hitches."

Tajudin, in his capacity as president of the chamber, had earlier received a US trade mission led by Undersecretary for International Trade, US Department of Commerce Ambassador David L. Aaron.

Tajudin said there is no indication the US plans to invest in Malaysia have been altered in any way by recent events and no concerns have been raised.

The chamber's deputy president Datuk Abdul Rahman Maidin said: "The American businessmen do not feel that the current recovery plans, especially on direct investment, would in any way hinder their perception or their direct investment."

Aaron had said earlier in his opening remarks: "We are here for the long term."

Abdul Rahman said the chamber would like to play the role of identifying local small and medium-scale enterprises within the group to pair up with US companies.

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