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Daim's appointment a boon to recovery: Rafidah

TUN Daim Zainuddin's appointment as Minister of Special Functions in the Prime Minister's Department will further enhance the linkage between the Cabinet and the National Economic Action Council (NEAC), thereby accelerating decision-making and programmes for economic recovery.

International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said, "When you have the executive director of the NEAC as a Cabinet member, he can not only tell us what is being done but the rest of the (Cabinet) ministers can have their inputs via the executive director about what they feel about certain things."

She was speaking to reporters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday after the opening of the SMI Showcase '98 and Apec Cross Border Linkages by Prime Minister Dr Seri Mahathir Mohamad in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Dr Mahathir has announced Daim's appointment and that of Tan Sri Kasitah Gaddam as Land and Cooperative Development Minister on Wednesday. Both will swear in as ministers at Istana Negara today.

Asked if Daim will oversee certain financial institutions, Rafidah said, "I do not think Daim will oversee anything. He will come in as another Cabinet minister except that he will zero in on economic recovery; so he will help fit the pieces together."

When asked if there were concerns raised by the Cabinet ministers on the appointment, she said that the other ministers took it well, adding that they had nicknamed Daim "Menteri Gawat (turmoil)".

Rafidah also said with the appointment, Daim will have to abide by all the conditions or rules just like other Cabinet ministers.

These include no business interests and the requirement to declare his assets to the Prime Minister.

Daim, 60, was the Finance Minister from 1984 to 1991 and is the Economic Adviser to the Government. He is also the executive chairman to the NEAC which was set up early this year to advise the Government on ways to handle the economic crisis.

Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu sees Daim's appointment as a good choice that would help the country overcome financial problems.

He said Daim's experience in the corporate world and as former Finance Minister will contribute a lot to the country's progress, especially in the wake of the current economic crisis.

"I believe that the Prime Minister's choice is good... the appointment will be fruitful, with Daim's experience as a corporate figure and the former finance minister," Samy Vellu told reporters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday after meeting his counterpart, Mr C.M. Udasi from Karnataka, India.

Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Megat Junid Megat Ayob, speaking to reporters after opening a seminar "Consumers' Role during the Economic Crisis" in Kuala Lumpur, said the appointment will give Daim the authority in carrying out his duties.

"Daim is an economic expert and the appointment will give him breathing space to work. When he is carrying out his duties overseas, he will be able to meet with people holding ministerial positions, not only officials," he said.

Sabah Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister, Datuk Osu Sukam said Daim could help rehabilitate the country's economy and boost the confidence of the people.

Wanita Umno Chief Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman, in welcoming Daim's appointment, said any efforts aimed at resolving the current economic downturn are welcomed by the movement.

Bernama reports: National Malay Chamber of Commerce deputy president Datuk Abdul Rahman Maidin said Daim was the perfect choice for the job.

Hailing Daim's appointment as timely and appropriate, he said the expertise of people with wide economic knowledge should be pooled towards tackling the economic slump which was at a critical stage and required immediate action.

"It is for this reason that the Government needed additional assistance from a credible and calibred person like Daim who can devote full attention to the problems at hand without being bogged down by other administrative responsibilities," he said in a statement yesterday.

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