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State-level NEACs to keep people informed

Kamarul Yunus

ALL states, including Pas-led Kelantan, will have their respective National Economic Action Council (NEAC) headed by the respective menteri besar or chief ministers, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced yesterday.

The setting up of the NEAC has been approved by the Cabinet at its weekly meeting on Wednesday.

Dr Mahathir, speaking after chairing the Umno supreme council in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, said the state-level NEACs will act as an information channel to explain to the people the current economic situation as well as monitor the economic activities and problems at the grassroots level.

He said the state NEAC members will also arrange visits to districts and rural areas to assess the impact of the economic problems on the people.

"They (state NEAC members) should also try to provide the necessary support to facilitate and smoothen business activities in the state. This will include reducing red tape or bureaucratic procedures," he added.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said he is confident that Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat will give the same support as the other menteri besar and chief ministers in tackling the economic problems.

"In terms of managing the economy and its recovery, we do not consider it a party problem but a national problem.

"I am confident that the Kelantan Menteri Besar will carry out his duty as the other menteri besar and chief ministers from Barisan Nasional," he added.

The Cabinet on Wednesday also approved the composition of members in the NEAC. Cabinet ministers holding economic-related portfolios will also be members of the Council. Representatives from the other private sectors have yet to be determined. The Government is expected to announce the full list soon.

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether the Government would step up efforts to disseminate information to overcome rumours.

"We have disseminated adequate information. When we said our banks are strong and fundamentals are good, this is not only repeated by us but also the foreign authorities.

"Everybody say our fundamentals are okay but those who believe in rumours don't. When I said I am healthy, they would still say that although I look healthy, I am trying to hide something," he added.

He took to task Malaysians who would listen to rumours rather than the factual explanation by the Government.

"We have stepped up (efforts) but I just don't understand ... although the rumours may crop up 100 times and proven to be untrue, they (the public) still listen to and spread these rumours.

"How many times have I been rumoured to resign? How many times have I been rumoured to have fainted ... dissolve the Cabinet? All of these are untrue but yet they still make new rumours ... the latest is that my son has committed suicide," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he does not understand why people give credence to rumours when the Government has already made statements on the situation.

"When we say we have the money, we really have the money. When we say we have enough sugar, we really mean that but they still prefer to believe the rumours," he added.

Quoting an English saying, Dr Mahathir said Malaysians are "shooting themselves in the foot" by believing such rumours.

The Prime Minister said the rumour-mongers are the ones creating the problems faced by the country.

"They spread rumours saying that banks are going bankrupt. So, we withdraw our money from the banks. This would create problems to the banks.

"They (banks) are still strong. How many times do the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, and even the Bank Negara Governor have to repeat this," he stressed.

Dr Mahathir said even international authorities such as the International Monetary Fund had repeatedly said that the country's economic fundamentals and banking system are strong.

He dismissed suggestions that the rumours were spread by people who received information from certain high-ranking officers.

"This is not true. Some people said he heard the rumours from certain people but when we checked with the source, he denied have said them.

"At some point, some people even said he had just seen the Prime Minister ... of course, he met and saw the Prime Minister, probably on the streets or on television," he said.

The Prime Minister was also asked on comment on Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee's reluctance to provide information pertaining to losses incurred by Warisan Harta Sdn Bhd to Umno members.

"Umno members can obtain information from the Sabah Chief Minister because he is a partner in the Government. However, it would be difficult for us to explain everything.

"We (Umno members) can still ask the Sabah Chief Minister on the matter through the proper channel ... if there is something wrong, we will look into it," he added.

Sabah Umno Youth had asked Yong to explain the alleged losses of up to RM72 million incurred by Warisan Harta, after having acquired three million shares in North Borneo Timber Bhd.

However, Dr Mahathir said it it would be difficult to explain everything when such a matter is brought up by the Opposition.

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