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PM's speech gets unanimous support from BN leaders

t Ling; Azrani Rustam; Shahrum Sayuti

LEADERS of Barisan Nasional component parties said the Prime Minister's message underlined the need for unity in the face of the country's economic problems.

Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's speech had given the people a detailed perspective of the problems faced by the country.

Lim said Dr Mahathir's explanation drove home the point that it was not the time for anyone to point fingers at anybody for the cause of the economic downturn.

"It is time that the people, including members of BN component parties remain united and jointly face the challenges," he added.

He expressed disappointment with the attitude of foreign analysts who did not give Malaysia a chance to work out its own economic recovery.

Citing the criticisms of the proposed "barter trade" between Malaysia and China with Malaysia exchanging its palm oil for China's corn, Lim said before the Government made a decision on the proposal, the foreign analysts had launched scathing attacks on the idea claiming that it was against the World Trade Organisation.

"They claimed that we will lose if we resort to such means and they thought we are stupid," he added.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said Dr Mahathir's speech sent a clear message not only to Umno members but also to all Malaysians to unite in facing attacks on the country's economy.

He said the Prime Minister took "great pains" to explain the objectives and the actions of currency speculators and how they had caused the devaluation of the ringgit and the collapse of the stock market.

He said attacks on the economy, if not resisted, could "drive Malaysia into the clutches of the International Monetary Fund".

"If that happens, the IMF will demand unnecessary and strict reforms which could worsen the situation, like what has happened in Thailand and Indonesia.

"Dr Mahathir clearly highlighted that the economy could be taken over by foreigners if our economy collapses. This means a slide back into history and we will lose whatever the New Economic Policy has given us ... stability, harmony and prosperity."

On cronism, Dr Ling said the the term had to be looked from the Malaysian context.

"Crony is not a bad word in the Malaysian context since everyone has benefitted economically."

Works Minister and MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said Dr Mahathir's speech was significant as he advised the people of their responsibility for the well-being of the country.

He said Dr Mahathir had given the guidelines on how the country should be run by Malaysians and not by others.

"I feel if we are to follow his advice, we will be able to overcome our economic problems."

He said the people must not become agents to outsiders whose aim was to destroy the country.

Samy Vellu said Malaysians would continue to support the measures taken by the Government in tackling the economic woes.

On whether existing policies like the New Economic Policy should be

continued, he said they had proven effective in uniting the country's multiracial society.

Sabah Chief Minister and Parti Demokratik Sabah president Tan Sri Bernard Dompok said yesterday said there was still room for affirmative action to be taken to assist the less fortunate and to ensure the economic pie was divided fairly among the various communities.

"This fact is very clear from the Prime Minister's opening speech. What he also made very clear was that all Malaysians should work together to help the country overcome its problems."

This, he said, was because economies in Asia had become the target of "people outside the country".

But what was fortunate, he said, was that the sovereignty of the nation had been maintained despite the onslaught of these people who were out only for material profit.

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