

Government to monitor projects

Stimulus package receives encouragement

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. The Government will strictly monitor all projects earmarked under the RM4.3 billion stimulus package announced yesterday to ensure the allocations were spent during the stipulated period.

National Economic Action Committee (NEAC) executive chairman Datuk Mustapa Mohamed said a meeting will be held with all government agencies and departments on Monday to ensure projects planned are completed in the shortest possible time.

"We have to ensure that the allocations are spent in the time frame given to enable it to become a catalyst to the growth of the country's economy," Mustapa said in Kota Baru today.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in announcing the economic stimulus package yesterday, said it was aimed at generating economic activities with the biggest spin-off effects.

The new package focuses on small development projects, welfare, training of retrenched workers and the unemployed, and tourism promotion.

The announcement received widespread support from a cross section of society including government and opposition leaders, trade unions and the business community.

The Association of Computer and Multimedia Industry of Malaysia (Pikom) described the stimulus package, particularly the RM300 million injection to create computer labs in 2,000 schools as a move in the right direction.

Its chairman Looi Kien Leong said in a statement: "Not only will our children benefit from this move, but it will also stimulate the local information and communications industry."

The Malaysian Malay Businessmen And Industrialists Association (PERDASAMA) president, Datuk Mochamad Izat Emir, stated that the package would ensure the continued economic growth of between one to two percent.

Mochamad Izat said the decision to improve terms and access to financing under existing special funds for small and medium-scale

enterprises was a good move in encouraging them to explore new opportunities, especially for bumiputera enterprises.

"Bumiputera businessmen and industrialists should take advantage of the benefits of the package for their own benefit as well as the nation's," he said.

The Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) applauded the Government's proactive move to boost the economy but urged employers to be more responsible towards their workers.

MTUC president Senator Datuk Zainal Rampak said although the Government's efforts to kick-start the economy is significant to create employment, employers should also play their role effectively.

He also called on the Human Resource Ministry to set up employment exchanges in every major town and give priority to local workers over foreign ones.

"There should be no new recruitment of foreign workers and the existing ones should be sent back once their contracts are over," he said, adding that this would create more employment opportunities for locals.

In Seremban, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Abdul Samad said the package was part of an ongoing proactive step taken by the Government to keep the country's economy vibrant and thriving.

"All this shows the caring propensity of the Government and its resilience to cut off negative impacts from any global developments."

"In Negri Sembilan, we have received RM20 million from the earlier package which has been distributed to the relevant *Wakil Rakyat*, for projects to build roads, bridges and other public infrastructure," Isa said.

In Penang, Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said the announcement reflects the strong determination and decisiveness of Dr Mahathir to generate economic activities and business opportunities in the face of the American and global recession.

"I particularly welcome specific allocations to provide computer labs in 2,000 schools, retraining of

retrenched workers and special information technology courses for degree and diploma holders." Koh said, adding that the measures would have long-term positive impacts in upgrading the technology skills and productivity of the Malaysian workforce to sustain and sharpen the country's competitiveness in the global market.

Free Industrial Zone Penang Companies Association (Frepenca) president Datuk Wong Siew Hai said the move to stimulate the economy locally is a positive step.

In Malacca, Chief Minister Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam said the allocation will help sustain the State Government's tourism promotion efforts currently being carried out locally and in Asean countries.

"It is the State Government's hope that we will be able to receive part of the grant to enable us to carry out a more aggressive promotion for Malacca," he said.

In Johor Baru, Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman pledged that the State will ensure all projects undertaken under the stimulus package are implemented within the stipulated time frame.

"We will ensure that none of the projects to be implemented here will be disrupted or left ailing."

"To this end, we will ensure that the projects, especially the small rural projects and the upgrading of Kemas kindergartens: will be awarded to the right people within the allocated three months," he said today.

Ghani particularly welcomed the allocation for the re-training of retrenched workers as the state is bracing itself for the expected lay-off of up to 7,000 workers in the industrial sector.

In addition, the gloomy economic scenario in Singapore is expected to lead to the retrenchment of hundreds of Malaysian workers currently employed in the republic.

Terengganu Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang commended the Government for the RM4.3 billion fund injection into the economy. He, however, urged for greater emphasis on the agriculture sector in order to increase the country's food supply.