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PACKAGE-GOVT

ECONOMIC PACKAGE REFLECTS SPIRIT OF CHANGE IN GOVT STRATEGIES

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KUALA LUMPUR, May 22 (Bernama) -- That the government has come out with a new strategic economic package to reinforce the domestic economy simply drives home the message that action speaks louder than words.

It demonstrates a spirit of change in its economic strategy where the focus is on mobilising new sources of growth domestically and reducing the country's dependence on the external sector.

Detractors may say that the government should have come out with its economic package to breathe new life into the domestic economy as early as March.

But what is the use of being hasty and coming out with only a half-baked strategy in the process?

The package, which was announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday, was worth the wait.

It amply demonstrated the government's thoroughness in dealing with the nuts and bolts of the situation given that 90 measures were rolled out to "set the wheels" of the domestic economy into greater motion.

Every detail was looked into and no stone was left unturned in its endeavour to effect a "growth plus plus" economic package as opposed to merely a stimulus package.

And why not? The all-encompassing economic package represented the government's all-out attempt to effect growth in the domestic economy through promoting private investment and developing new sources of growth plus improving the national delivery system plus enhancing Malaysia's competitiveness.

The RM7.3 billion to be pumped into the economy amounted to 2.0 percent of Malaysia's Gross Domestic Product and this is certainly larger than the recent off-budget economic packages announced by Hong Kong at only 1.0 percent of GDP and Singapore at 0.1 percent of GDP.

All this point to the fact that it would not be unreasonable for Malaysians to be cautiously optimistic on an economic growth of at least 4.5 percent this year.

The utilisation of RM7.3 billion in the package also represented the government's pragmatic and responsible approach in addressing the issues at hand.

It is not about throwing money to chase growth. But it is about getting the key "grass root" economic sectors with strong multiplier effects -- small and medium-scale enterprises, agriculture and rural development, and mass housing projects -- to get the domestic economy moving.

On the other hand, one must not forget that the economic package was not all about economics per se. It also mirrored the government's caring attitude for the rakyat. There was plenty in store for almost everyone.

The House Ownership for the People (HOPE) project is a case in point, for it allows new buyers and first-time owners of houses costing below RM100,000 to pay at subsidised and concessionary rates.

Even for ex-police and military personnel, government employees, widows of government employees as well as single mothers who do not own homes can now buy apartments at a 20 percent discount from the government via Syarikat Perumahan Negara Bhd.

Dwellers of government flats are also not left behind as the government wants to provide them with a more comfortable environment. Government flats of more than five years old will be given a face lift through repainting,

landscaping and the provision of improved recreational facilities like playgrounds, libraries and childcare centres.

The economic package shows that the government means business and that it is also its business to care for the rakyat's well-being. -- BERNAMA  
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