

01 MAR 2003

Rafidah-interview

GREATER DOMESTIC DEMAND COULD CUSHION EFFECT OF WAR IN IRAQ, SAYS

RAFIDAH

KUALA LUMPUR, March 1 (Bernama) -- Malaysia could cushion the effect of a possible war in Iraq by increasing domestic demand, said International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz.

She said although the war could have adverse effect on the country, the government could try to accelerate economic growth by increasing domestic demand.

"Not that we could cover fully whatever shortages there are in the external sector, but the gap will not be damaging because of our diverse fundamentals," she said in an interview in "Bicara Bernama", a weekly programme produced by Bernama, over Astro Ria tonight.

Rafidah said local entrepreneurs should also make a switch from traditional sectors such as construction to other productive sectors such as manufacturing.

In addition, she said Malaysia would also have the opportunity to export its products to the Middle East and other Asean countries.

"Even last year, our biggest market was Asean at 26 per cent with the United States dropping to number two," she said.

Rafidah said the government would continue to promote Malaysia as a regional centre for Asean market.

In the event of war, she said foreign investors might be more attracted to Malaysia because of the Asean market, not jeopardised by war unlike the American and Middle East markets.

Rafidah, who is also Wanita Umno Chief, was also asked on what the country's political situation would be like after the resignation of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as Prime Minister in October.

She said she did not think that there would be a mass resignation of Cabinet ministers.

Rafidah said the proponents of such idea were ignorant of the responsibilities of Cabinet ministers.

It would be Dr Mahathir who would resign as the Prime Minister, not the whole Barisan Nasional (BN) government, she said.

She said other ministers in the Cabinet would still have duties and obligations which required their attention.

"When Pak Lah (Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) becomes PM, it will be up to him then (on who should go and stay)," she said.

Rafidah said it would all depend on one's luck of whether to be nominated or not to stand in the general election or to be retained as a minister after the election.

"If he says, 'goodbye', 'goodbye' it will be for us and if he wants to appoint newcomers, we shouldn't be angry," she said.

Rafidah said that although a change in the number one position in the party and the government would likely lead to bickering within the party, she was confident that it would not jeopardise the party and country.

"In fact there will not be many changes because it will be an Umno leader also, the Umno's vision also. If there are changes in posts and so on, maybe a little bit of bickering," she said.

On Abdullah's gentle personality, not vocal like Dr Mahathir, she said it was a very appropriate approach for someone in a number two position in the government.

Rafidah said such low profile and not to overshadow the Number One was also adopted by Dr Mahathir when he was deputy to Tun Hussein Onn.

"When he was DPM (deputy prime minister) not many people knew Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir. I think it was done on purpose as a deputy to keep a low profile, not to project himself too much and to be more vocal than the Number One.

"Tun Hussein, as we all know, was not very vocal and he also did not talk much.

"I am sure when Pak Lah becomes the leader, he will display his Number One's character and we hope his Number Two will also know his place. So don't be big-headed," she said.

-- BERNAMA

NHA NHZ AZZ ABG