

PM: BE REALISTIC

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. —
The National Economic Consultative Council is to get the people involved in charting their own future and should not be turned into a political forum, the Prime Minister said.

He said the noble effort to get the people involved would fail if the council became a **political** forum to *serve* the selfish interests of any group or individual.

He also told the council that to be realistic in shaping the replacement for the New Economic Policy (NEP).

He said the NEP had served the nation well despite various setbacks but those who drew it up had been "too optimistic" in their targets.

Dr Mahathir's **speech** at the launching of the council at the Putra World Trade Centre was read out by Deputy Prime

Don't let NECC be turned into a political forum, says Mahathir

Minister Abdul &afar Baba.

All 150 members of the council, except for the five DAP representatives and MTUC secretary-general V. David, were present.

The DAP had said that it would not attend the council's sessions unless party leaders Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh, now detained under the Internal Security Act, did not have to take part by proxy. Dr David, who is a DAP member although he was named a union representative, gave the same reason for not attending.

Others at the opening included former Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn, Cabinet Ministers and other prominent Malaysians in and outside the Government.

Dr Mahathir said the NEP, formulated after the 1969 racial riots, was a "socio-economic engineering" programme of the

kind never tried out by any country.

"But it was too ambitious," he said. "We believed that over 20 years (from 1969), we could eradicate poverty and strike an economic balance among the various races without affecting national development."

He said poverty still existed in affluent countries like the United States, the European countries and Japan.

"Many people in these **advanced** countries depend on dole to **merely** survive," Dr Mahathir said.

He said poverty could only be reduced to a level where starvation, like what is happening in some countries, would **not** occur.

As for the **NEP's** objective of restructuring society, Dr Mahathir said that in the corporate sense it meant providing 30

per cent equity shares to the bumiputras, 40 per cent to the non-bumiputras and the rest to foreigners.

"Today, we realise the target had been too **optimistic**," the Prime Minister said.

"Even though the Government had set up hundreds of companies and **provide** funds for them to achieve the **bumiputra** quota, we could only achieve 20 per cent."

Dr Mahathir said non-bumiputra share in the corporate sector had, on the other hand, risen from 38 per cent at the beginning of the NEP to about 57 per cent now.

He said that when the recession set in there was less emphasis on restructuring **society** because the Government did not want the distribution of wealth among the "haves" to affect job opportunities for others, especially the poor.

By building more academic institutions and increasing the number of **scholar**-shins, the Government had honed to reduce poverty and check the tendency to identify economic **functions** according to race, he said.

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warns
against
negative
talk

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Dr Mahathir said many people were still poor, certain economic activities were still identified according to race and economic imbalances among the various races still existed.

"In this respect, should we ask if our objectives need to be rectified? Are we to pursue the same goals or set up new objectives?"

Dr Mahathir said each community in Malaysia tended to think that it was losing out to the others.

He said both bumiputras and non-bumiputras could be right or wrong but whatever their views they should not deny that during the time the NEP was implemented Malaysia had made inroads politically, economically and socially.

He said that during the 31 years of independence, the system of parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy had been successfully practised in the country.

The major achievement, however, was in economic development, he added.

From a country which was only supplying tin and rubber to the West, Malaysia was now selling to the world manufactured goods such as components, electronic parts, air-conditioners, toys and cars, he said.

He said Malaysia's per capita income had increased sharply and the emphasis now was on creating more jobs for the people.

Dr Mahathir said he regretted the charges of "a certain chauvinistic group" that the NEP was not just and that the Government often manipulated statistics.

He said other chauvinistic groups could turn around to revoke the allegations. "Such actions will not resolve any problem. On the other hand it could make matters worse."

Dr Mahathir said the Government was sad that its liberal move to form the council had been politicised by some groups.

"They try to put a bad light to this effort by the Government that goes beyond normal democratic practices," he said.

The Prime Minister said if this approach of handling national issues brought good results, it could be used to tackle other problems as well.