

PM: We have to quicken pace to reach the top

By K.P. Waran

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — Malaysia must move at a quicker pace and not rest on its laurels in the effort to become a developed country on par with the world's best, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said the exercise demands close collaboration of all institutions and personalities involved in the nation's development.

"By any standard, we have done well but there is no time to rest on our laurels. We must aim to become a developed country on par with those in Europe and North America.

"It may not happen tomorrow or next year or even by the end of this millennium, but we must not be discouraged. Everything must have a beginning. We have gone beyond the first step. Now we must continue at a quickened pace."

Dr Mahathir made this point when he launched the 62-member Malaysian Business Council (MBC) here. The MBC was established to pave the way for better co-operation between the public and private sectors.

The council is made up of national leaders, top Government officials, leading industrialists and other personalities known for their deep knowledge and experience in their respective fields.

The Prime Minister said that to expedite the attainment of the nation's goals, "we must set new standards and make quantum leaps — in terms of all the key institutions in the country, in terms of our economic culture, adjustments and innovations."

For this, he said, the Government, the private sector, workers, management and all the institutions which are directly or indirectly involved in the development of the nation must understand our goals and the road towards it.

"This national aspiration must be shared by all, at every level. It is not a grandiose dream that we are targetting at. It is an achievable vision, provided of course that we all pull together," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government had already espoused the Malaysia Incorporated concept, which is based on a partnership between the Government and the private sector, where both sectors are tasked with ensuring the nation's success and to share the benefits.

He added that despite initial criticism, the idea had caught on and, today, Government officers were more helpful towards the private sector and were constantly improving service through innovative ways.

"They now accept and appreciate that the private sector did not only make profits for itself but contributed towards economic growth and, therefore, towards the betterment of all, including themselves.

"The private sector which welcomed the concept of Malaysia Incorporated must not only expect better service from the Government but must also contribute towards its realisation.

"They must make it easier for the Government to serve them by understanding the regulatory role of Government and its concern for social and economic justice for all," he said.

The Prime Minister, who is also council chairman, said collaboration that resulted in negative social consequences and frustrated the achievement of national values and aspirations must be countered.

He said in many areas there must be more than an arm's length relationship while in other instances there must be productive regulation.

"What is good for the business sector may not always be good for the people as a whole. But in many areas, we do work closer. The Council is one of the mechanisms intended to contribute further to this relationship," he added.

Stressing the need for free and frank exchange of views and ideas to ensure the effectiveness of the council, Dr Mahathir pointed out that there can be no in-depth examination or discussion if there was no commitment to candour.

He then listed the four primary objectives of the council:

- To facilitate a free flow of information and ideas between the public and private sector;

- To address problems pertaining to industrial and commercial development and to remove impediments to economic growth;

- To create better understanding and to enhance the relationship between the public and private sector; and,

- to identify and promote areas of cooperation and collaboration between them.

Dr Mahathir said to fulfill these objectives, the council will examine domestic and international business and economic de-

velopments central to Malaysia's aspirations, discuss current and emerging issues and problems and also examine and provide practical options and strategies.

It will also provide feedback on policy issues and developments with regard to industrialisation, remove misunderstandings and barriers to productive co-operation between the public and private sectors and generate consensus on national economic directions and strategies.

He told council members that their membership "is a responsibility to this country and to the people." In this regard, he hoped the members will "speak and listen intently, with an open heart and an open mind."

He said Government has set up a Centre for Economic Research and Services with adequate staffing to be responsible for research, secretarial, organisational and administrative services for the council.

Reviewing the economic scenario of the country, Dr Mahathir said, Malaysia was not going to achieve the growth rates of the three previous years, "if we sit back and do nothing".

"We must be prepared to move away from the beaten path. We must be prepared to take risk, reasonable risks. The Government is ready to make adjustments. It is ready to listen, accommodate and support the private sector.

"I hope this council will be able to play a leading role in the difficult time ahead. God Willing, together we can overcome," he concluded.