

Frank talks in business council ⁽¹⁷⁾ essential: PM

FRANK discussions and free flow of information and ideas are essential for the 62-member Malaysian Business Council (MBC) to discuss ways to further improve the Malaysia Inc policy — a concept based on effective partnership between the Government and the private sector.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said, as chairman of the council, he will speak frankly and he expects fellow members to do the same. Without this, he added, there can be no in-depth discussions.

"We cannot remove misunderstandings and roadblocks to productive cooperation if we fail to communicate clearly. If practical options and strategies are to come forth, there must be a free and frank exchange of information.

"I hope every council member will speak and listen intently with an open heart and mind. The success of this council will depend on the commitment and responsibility of the members," he said

at the council's inauguration in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the Malaysia Inc concept, despite initial scepticism, has caught on with the public and private sectors, between which cooperation has improved.

In addition, the private sector must make it easier for the Government to serve them by understanding the regulatory role of the Government and its concern for social and economic justice for all.

"Let us all be perfectly clear. By no means can it be argued that all collaboration between the public and private sectors is justifiable or necessary.

"There is cooperation that is productive and there is collaboration that is unproductive. Collaboration that results in negative social consequences, in frustrating the achievement of national values and aspirations must be fought against," he said.

The MBC has four pri-

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mary objectives, namely:

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

- 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 sectors; and,

- To identify and promote areas of cooperation and collaboration between the public and private sectors.

To ensure the necessary administrative back-up, the Government has set up a centre for economic research and service to be located at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (Isis), with adequate staffing.

The centre will be responsible for research, secretarial, organisational and administrative services for the MBC. The Government has allocated an annual sum for the operational costs of the MBC.

"There is no compulsion on the private sector as a whole to make financial contributions to the council and its work. But provision has been made for all private sector donations to the council to be tax-exempt," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said.

He said the country, in its first

three decades, has moved rapidly from being a low-income, undeveloped economy, relying merely on rubber and tin as its economic mainstay, to a nation that has diversified into the services and industrial sectors, backed by a sophisticated financial system.

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

"It may not happen tomorrow or next year or even by the end of this millenium but we must not be discouraged," he said.

He told council members that Malaysia will not achieve the high growth rates of the previous three years if "we sit back and do nothing".

He said: "If we are to ensure minimum harm to our economy due to the Gulf war, we must make adjustments and we must act. We must be prepared to move away from the beaten path. We must prepare to take risks, reasonable risks.

"The Government is ready to make these adjustments. It is ready to listen, and to accommodate and support the private sector. I hope the council will be able to play a leading role in the difficult times ahead. God willing, together we can overcome," he said.

— By Azam Aris