

FOR BETTER RAPPOR

The Malaysian Business Council is seen as a step in the right direction.

■ *Tan Chew May*

THE STAGE IS now set for the development of greater understanding and cooperation between the public and private sectors — with the recent formation of the Malaysian Business Council.

The council has 62 members — 10 ministers, eight leaders from the public service and 44 leaders from the private sector. It is chaired by the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, with deputy prime minister Encik Ghafar Baba as deputy chairman.

The Prime Minister said, after the launching of the council recently, that all members are required to be present at meetings which will be held three times a year.

According to him, it cannot be argued that all collaboration between the public and private sectors is necessary. 'In many areas there must be more than an arms-length relationship. On many issues there must be productive regulation. What is good for the business sector may not be good for the people as a whole. We need to work closer in many areas and the council is one way of achieving this.

'We want to listen to the views of the members but we are not required to pass resolutions, to vote or to achieve consen-

sus on the views that are expressed,' Dr Mahathir explained. 'We will assess the various views expressed and those which we think can be accepted, implemented or incorporated into the government's policies, will be done so,' he added.

Dr Mahathir said the council has four primary objectives. Firstly, it will facilitate a free flow of information and ideas between the public and private sectors. The council will also address problems pertaining to industrial and commercial development and remove impediments to economic growth.

It will also strive to create better understanding as well as enhance the relationship between the public and private sectors. Another aim is to identify and promote areas of cooperation and collaboration between the public and private sectors. The council will function as an advisory body and not formulate new policies.

In order to fulfill the council's objectives, the terms of reference are as follows:

- to examine domestic and international business and economic developments central to Malaysia's aspirations;
- to discuss current and emerging issues



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— *Dato' Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad*

and problems;

- to examine and provide practical options and strategies;
- to provide feedback on policy issues and development with regard to industrialisation;
- to remove misunderstandings and barriers to productive cooperation between the public and private sectors; and
- to generate consensus on national economic directions and strategies.

'There can be no in-depth examination or discussion if there is no commitment to candour. We cannot remove misunderstanding and barriers to productive cooperation if we fail to communicate clearly,' Dr Mahathir noted.

If practical options and strategies are to come forth, there must be a free and

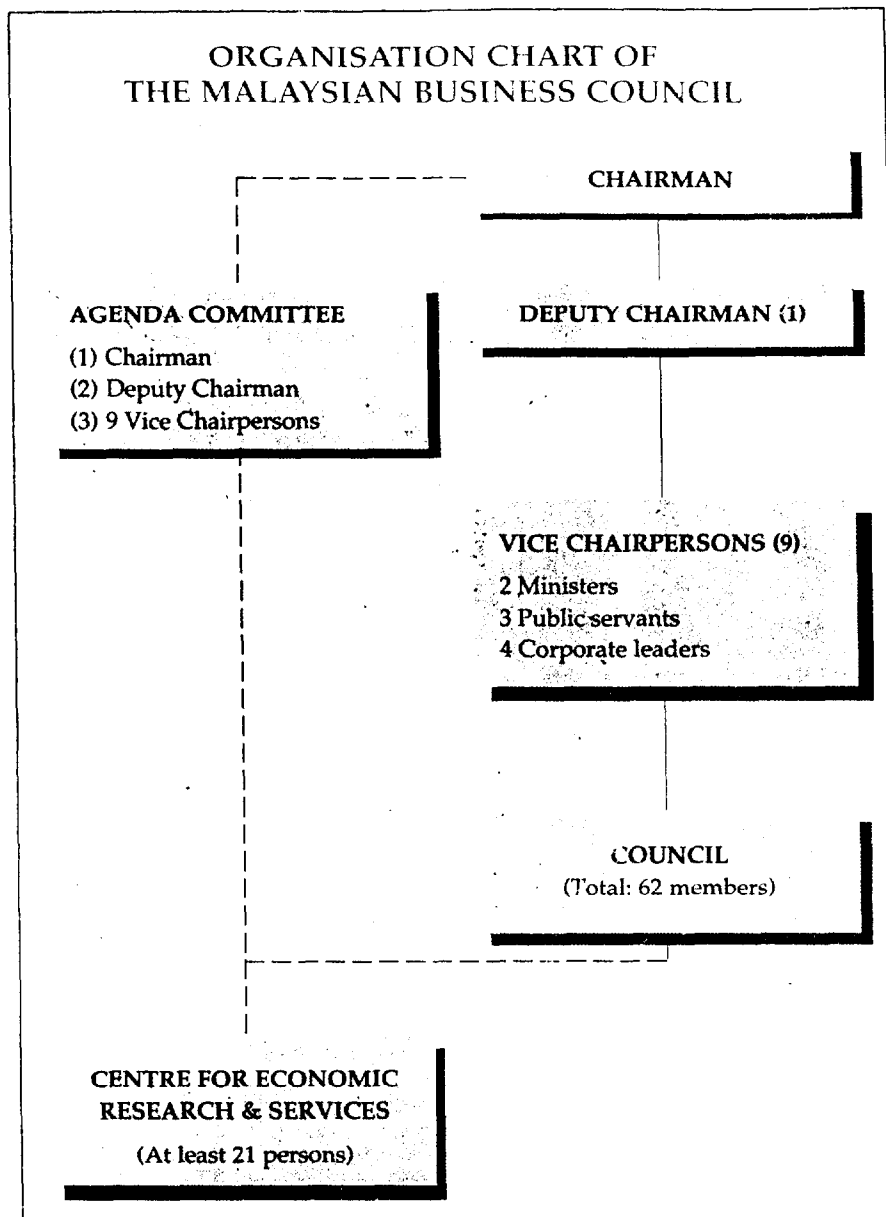
Earlier we had to see several ministries to solve one issue as some areas were out of the scope of some ministries. Now we can sit on one forum and deal with each issue with the ministries.

frank exchange of information and ideas. 'I hope every Council member will speak and listen intently, with an open heart and an open mind.'

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

This centre will be responsible for research, secretarial, organisational and administrative services for the Malaysian Business Council. 'The government has allocated an annual sum for the operational costs of the centre. There is no compulsion on the private sector to make financial contributions to the council and its work. But provisions have been made for all private sector donations to the council to be tax-exempted,' Dr Mahathir pointed out.

Mr Tan Keok Yin, executive director of Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers



says the Malaysian Business Council cuts across various jurisdictions and also penetrates the different government agencies. 'Previously one had to approach the various ministries concerned to voice a certain opinion. Now the council provides a forum for discussion for the parties involved.'

Sharing Mr Tan's views is Mr Larry Gan, who is both country managing partner of Andersen Consulting and Pikom chairman. Mr Gan says with the presence of the council, some of the old problems faced by the information technology industry can be eliminated.

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Mr Gan says it is important for the council to quickly identify areas that need to be looked into and immediately zero in rather than adopt a wide strategic approach.

He adds that in terms of representation of members, there seems to be a good spread but 'I would like to see more members from the IT sector. At the moment, only one member of the council is from this sector which is growing rapidly.'

Clearly, procedural and representational problems such as these will have to be worked out as the council starts deliberating on issues. But these can be ironed out over time so that the council becomes a powerful tool for enhanced cooperation between the government and the private sector.