

Consultative group to help Government tackle global issues

By Fauziah Ismail

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. -- A Consultative Group on Global Issues will be set up under the high-powered Malaysian Business Council to help the Government tackle international issues that may affect national interest.

These issues may range from labour and trade linkages to movements in international currencies.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said this was decided at the sixth plenary meeting of the 76-member council here today.

He told a news conference after chairing the five-hour meeting the Government had given an undertaking to seriously consider the issues taken up by the consultative group.

This was the Malaysian Business Council's first meeting for the year.

"There are many global issues such as attempts to link labour issues with trade, the escalating value of the Japanese yen and devaluation of the US dollar, telecommunications, taxes and tariffs, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the World Trade Organisation.

"We need to take a stand on these issues ... The consultative group will look into them," he said, adding that members of the proposed consultative group will be identified soon.

The Malaysian Business Council is the country's ultimate think-tank. The coun-

cil is made up 11 ministers and 52 corporate leaders. Trade union leaders, environmentalists and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) representatives also sit on the council.

Among those who attended yesterday's meeting were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Economic Advisor to the Government Tun Daim Zainuddin, Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Agriculture Minister Datuk Sulaiman Daud and Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed.

Bank Negara governor Ahmad Mohd Don, Renong executive chairman Tan Sri Halim Saad, Telekom Malaysia chairman Tan Sri Rashdan Baba, Tenaga Nasional chairman Tan Sri Ani Arope and Permodalan Nasional Bhd chairman Tun Ismail Ali also attended.

It was understood that the proposal for the setting up of the consultative group was contained in a paper tabled by Land and General Bhd chairman Tan Sri Wan Azmi Wan Hamzah.

The paper was prepared by the Malaysian Business Council's working committee on Malaysia Incorporated and the role of the private and public sectors. The committee is chaired by Daim.

It was believed that the paper incorporated the proposal made by Malaysian

envoys at the foreign missions' meeting organised by Wisma Putra last August. The envoys had stressed the need for Malaysia to work towards a more coordinated and consistent approach to global issues.

They had suggested the establishment of a forum of experts in view of the emergence of a whole range of complex global issues.

The proposed setting up of the Consultative Group on Global Issues is also said to be in preparation for the possible threats and challenges faced by the country in the future.

It will enable Malaysia to "fight back when attacked" on certain global issues, analysts said.

Besides advising the Government on global issues, it was understood that the proposed consultative group would also analyse the threats and challenges in a larger perspective of national and international interests.

Members of the proposed consultative group are expected to comprise senior officials and experts from ministries and departments related to global issues, private sector representatives, NGOs and research institutes and universities.

The meeting also discussed reverse investments and the modernisation and commercialisation of agriculture.

On reverse investments, Dr Mahathir said the discussion centred on problems faced by companies invest-

ing in other countries and the effectiveness of their projects.

"We consider reverse investments as important. When the Japanese invested in Malaysia, we became more affluent and began buying a lot from Japan.

"Similarly, when we invest in other countries, we help them achieve some level of affluence and as such, they will buy from us. Our trade with these countries will eventually increase," he said.

He said he hoped more Malaysian companies would invest in countries in Indo-China, Africa, Central Asia and South America.

The meeting also discussed the modernisation and commercialisation of traditional agricultural activities and the participation of Bumiputeras in the field.

Members of the Malaysian Business Council also proposed the setting up of a unit trust fund for farmers, joint venture projects between traditional farmers and private companies, and courses for the farmers.

"Changes, too, have to be made to the image and quality of life of the farming sector. Farmers are no longer peasants but have moved into being a commercial community. We want to improve the quality of life of the community," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Agriculture Ministry would pursue the recommendations.

— Business Times