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Charting course to developed status (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today launched the National Economic Consultative Council 2, urging members to come up with ideas which are futuristic and relevant.

Dr Mahathir said it was important for members of the NECC 2 to spur a paradigm shift, allowing society to venture into new areas which would widen its capabilities.

"We have to take measures which are more aggressive and strategic to achieve our national development goals in the context of globalisation," he said.

The NECC 2, headed by former chief secretary to the Government Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid and represented by 155 members, would help propel the nation into developed status by year 2020 and face the challenges of a globalised world.

The council, with members drawn from a wide spectrum of groups, will be part of the crucial process of formulating Malaysia's national development policy for the first decade of the new millennium. It will evaluate the performance of the current National Development Policy including factors contributing to or impeding the achievement of its objectives.

It will also make recommendations for a new policy which will steer national development beyond the year 2000, taking into account the objectives and challenges of Vision 2020.

The NDP which replaced the New Economic Policy expires next year.

The NECC 2 comprises members of political parties, including two from the Opposition in Sabah, former ministers, representatives of chambers of commerce, professional bodies, industry and trading associations, non-governmental organisations, minority groups, youth and women and selected individuals from major ethnic groups from Sabah and Sarawak.

It will submit its report, containing inputs from members and other parties, to the Cabinet in September next year.

Dr Mahathir said the new millennium would bring about various challenges because commitments made by the international community under various agreements would make globalisation a reality.

"This trend is unavoidable given the fact that trade, capital, manpower, technology and information are increasingly becoming borderless," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this rapid development would bring about challenges in all aspects of the people's lives, including economy, education, commerce and others.

"This means we have to change our strategies into something which is different from those we adopted before so that the country will be able to adapt to the challenges of globalisation and liberalisation."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had already taken various initiatives to become part of the global society.

These initiatives include strategies to turn Malaysia into a regional hub in many areas such as education, transport, health, tourism, information technology and multimedia.

"We have taken various measures but there is much more to be done to make this country as developed as others," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the NECC 2 was not set up for political reasons as concluded by certain quarters which had turned down the Government's invitation to be members of the forum.

The DAP, Pas and Parti Rakyat Malaysia had rejected the Government's

invitation.

Dr Mahathir said the period of between 10 and 20 years to be covered by the NECC 2 by itself should rule out any political motive.

"A term of 10 to 20 years is more than the term for a certain political party to rule after winning an election.

"Political affiliation is not a consideration for membership of the NECC 2. The selection is made with the hope that all sections of Malaysian society will be represented and the ideas generated are from our own, for our own," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the opportunity to be represented in the NECC 2 should be accepted with an open heart.

"Anyone who loves this country should put aside his personal interests and political ideology to become part of this grouping," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the NECC 2 was not a forum for political exchanges.

"In the political arena, we can roll up our sleeves and put up a fight, but in meetings such as this we should sit together and exchange ideas in the spirit of musyawarah.

"We have to be together as far as the interest of the nation is concerned."

Dr Mahathir said the Government was able to formulate its own policies on its own.

"But that is not the Government's way of doing things. This Government gives the opportunity to everyone to make contributions," he said.

Later, the Prime Minister held a short discussion with members of youth associations and minority groups.

They included president of the Malaysian Youth Council Saifuddin Abdullah, Jamaludin Abdul Rahim of Gerakan Belia 4B, Malaysian Youth Clubs Association's Datuk Zainal Ismail and Malaysian Sikh Association's Sukhveer Singh.

(END)