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120 resolutions for development policies in new millennium

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THE two-day Fourth Bumiputera Economic Congress was concluded on Saturday, with more than 120 resolutions deliberated and endorsed as inputs for the Second National Economic Consultative Council (NECC II) to outline the nation's development policies in the new millennium.

In the next few weeks or months, members of the NECC II, led by former Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid, will be busy examining these resolutions, hoping that they be implemented by the Government as policies for a new economic blueprint to replace the National Development Policy which expires by the end of next year.

With less than five months before the NECC II members sit down and start cracking their heads to chart future national development agenda in its second meeting in January next year, the inputs from this Congress are considered as valuable and timely, and need immediate deliberation by the consultative council's committee members.

The NECC II is expected to present its initial report during the second meeting schedule for January 10-11 next year. The council held its first meeting on August 5 1999 and expected to hold two more meetings in May and August next year before submitting a full report to the Cabinet on September 2 2000.

To facilitate the screening and evaluating the resolutions and inputs from other organisations and associations, the NECC II had set up seven working committees since August 5. These committees are the National Unity; Restructuring of Society; Poverty Eradication; the Economy and National Competitiveness; Human Resources Development; Islamic Banking and Finance; and Science and Technology.

With the resolutions from the Fourth Congress already in the hands of the NECC II, the council's committee members should now be able to sit down and get to work faster to identify and outline the future policies. But their work will not be that simple as the resolutions from the Congress need to be refined.

Second Finance Minister and Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed had indicated this to the press after the closing of the Congress by First Finance Minister and Special Functions Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin on Saturday.

While appreciating the commitment and valuable inputs from more than 1,300 participants at the Congress, Mustapa said the resolutions need to be refined since the recommendations received by the organisers - Entrepreneur Development Ministry and Malay Chamber of Commerce, Malaysia (DPMM) - were too many and some of them seemed to be overlapping.

This was not surprising, considering the number of resolutions presented at the previous congresses also shown an increasing trend since the First Congress was held in 1965. There were 69 resolutions then, and the Second Congress three years later saw participants coming up with 83 resolutions, and the third with 63 recommendations.

It should also be noted that these resolutions did not include those proposals which were brought up and approved during discussions and workshops but were not documented.

"The resolutions are still raw in nature and we will have to refine them before presenting them to the Government," Mustapa had said, adding the NECC II had agreed with the Congress' organisers to set up a team to tackle this matter.

Ahmad Sarji, when interviewed by Business Times, concurred with Mustapa, saying that the seven committees under NECC II have started regular meetings and will continue to do so to deliberate and refine the resolutions. The former Chief Secretary to the Government, who now holds the chairmanship of Permodalan Nasional Bhd, said if there is a need, the NECC II's committees may meet frequently, at least once a month. The former head of the civil service, who received the resolutions from Datuk Idris Jusoh, the organising committee chairman, who is also Deputy Entrepreneur Development Minister, said he will circulate the recommendations to leaders of the seven committees as soon as possible. "We hope to be able to circulate the resolutions to the committees within this short period, with the hope to complete our initial report by December and deliberate it when the NECC II members meet for the second time in January," he said.

While the NECC II will provide a full concentration to evaluate the resolutions, the two-day Fourth Congress had been an inspiring and considered as a major achievement, especially to the two organisers. As quoted by co-chairmen of the Congress - Mustapa and DPMM president Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli - the Congress had been very successful in terms of participations, commitment and presentation during the two-day event. Through the seven workshops organised during the Congress, the topic of discussions covers almost all aspects, from education to religion as well as economics.

The areas covered were to strengthen Bumiputera participation in trade and industry; development of education and workforce for Bumiputera's agenda; Bumiputera's participation in the information technology and communications sector; Bumiputera's involvement in high technologies; the role of trust agencies and public sector companies in facing future challenges; the role of financial institutions in enhancing the creation of a trade and industry driven Bumiputera society; and the inculcation of cultural and religious values in creating a competitive Bumiputera individual.

All these were done to prepare the Bumiputeras to face the stiff challenges of the new millennium which will concentrate more on knowledge-based economic environment and the opening up of domestic market to foreigners as advocated by the world's economies under the new globalisation and borderless world regimes.

With the Bumiputera entrepreneurs still showing lack in strength and easily durable when facing economic pressure as shown in the recent economic crisis, the Government's role is still needed to safeguard their interests in future.

As such, Bumiputeras should thank the Government, particularly Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for giving the assurance that the special benefits given to help them secure a 30 per cent share in the country's wealth will not be taken away until the target is met.

However, Dr Mahathir, who spoke on this when opening the Congress on Friday, reminded the Bumiputeras not to be complacent but try to acquire as much knowledge as they can to build the inner strength so that they will be able to face and withstand whatever challenges that lie in the globalised and borderless world as championed by the developed nations.

"There is not short cut to this of getting as much knowledge as possible. The Government will try to safeguard the interest of the Bumiputera, such as the 30 per cent target, but it would be difficult to do so under the so-called globalised and borderless world where the small Bumiputera entrepreneurs have to compete on a level playing field with the giants of the international companies," said Dr Mahathir, whom Tajudin described as the "best trainer" for Bumiputera entrepreneurs.

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