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Mahathir-Opposition

OPPOSITION TURNED DOWN PARTICIPATION IN MAPEN II, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 4 (Bernama) -- The opposition parties in the peninsula have declined to sit on the Second National Economic Consultative Council (Mapen II) despite being invited to do so, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"We invited them, but they didn't want in. The number is not fixed, what we want to do is to set up a good consultative council," he said.

Speaking at a news conference after launching Mapen II at the Putra World Trade Centre, here, he said the opposition parties invited to join the council were the DAP, PAS dan PRM.

However, the opposition parties in Sabah and Sarawak had joined the body.

Mapen II, chaired by former chief secretary to the government Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid, was set up by the government to be a crucial part in the formulating of the national development policy for the first decade of the new millennium (2000-2010).

It comprises representatives of various groups and interests to reflect the views of all Malaysians and is given up to September next year to present its report to the Cabinet.

Asked whether the opposition parties would be accepted into the council should they change their minds later, Dr Mahathir said he did not know whether they would be accepted.

Earlier, during the launch, he said Mapen II was not for political purpose as thought by several parties which had turned down the government's invitation for contributions.

The duration of the long-term plan that was to be formulated negated that suspicion because the 10 or 20 years it covered was a long time which exceeded the rule of any political party that won the election, he said.

The council's membership which was no discriminatory also proved that the council did not have a political agenda, he added.

"The selection is made with the intention to have all parties in the Malaysia society represented so that the path it takes is determined by views from all the clever people in the country, with a new breath, and after taking into account all the important aspects," he said.

He said the chance to be a Mapen II member should be accepted with an open heart because anyone who loved the nation should set aside self-interest including political ideology.

"This is not the place to fight, a wise person should be able to weigh a particular move and adapt himself to current needs. In the fighting ring we roll up our sleeves but at a meeting we sit down and discuss," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the government could formulate policies without consulting any party but this was not the way of the Barisan Nasional (BN) government.

"This government wants to give everyone a chance to contribute towards the future of the country because it believes that every strata of society has rights.

"Hopefully, with the contributions, we can build an outstanding race and country that is respected and renowned in the world," he said.

He said the council provided a forum for its members to exchange ideas and views and if there were proposals for change or reform, this was the place and time to give one's views for debate, consideration and fine-tuning by all parties.

"I believe that constructive ideas that can withstand the test will be accepted by the council because the council members themselves are not just anybody," he said.

Mapen II comprises 155 people including representatives from political parties, former ministers, businessmen, professionals, representatives from non-governmental organisations, minority groups, youth and women's groups and selected individuals from the main ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak.

Its function is to assess the performance of the national development policy especially in eradicating poverty, restructuring the workforce and corporate equity and distributing revenue among the ethnic groups, rural and urban areas and the states.

It will then submit its proposals for a new policy to steer the country's development after the year 2000 by taking into account the objectives and challenges of Vision 2020 to make Malaysia a developed nation.

-- BERNAMA

AFY JK