

13/11/2000

NECC work shows racial co-operation

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ON Nov 3 all the major newspapers prominently covered the presentation ceremony of the final report of the Second National Economic Consultative Council (NECC II), attended by members of the consultative council, to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed in Putrajaya.

The proposals were contained in a 227-page report and were presented to the Prime Minister by council chairman Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid.

The council proposed that the National Development Policy for the next ten years (2001-2010) be renamed the Visionary Development Policy to chart a new direction for the country's national development and to map out Malaysia's growth for 2001-2010.

The proposed policy outlined nine thrusts covering key areas which included improving the country's competitiveness, human resource development, education, restructuring of society, poverty eradication, science and technology, finance and Islamic banking, and national unity.

Before handing over the final report to the Prime Minister, Ahmad Sarji summarised some of the recommendations that covered the eight areas mentioned.

Among the recommendations made included the setting up of a national competitive council to focus on competitiveness in line with the shift to knowledge-based economy.

There was also a suggestion to form a national innovation centre to encourage innovation in knowledge economy.

On human resource development, it was proposed to expand information communication technology (ICT) as well as related fields such as biotechnology to create knowledge-based workers.

With regard to eradication of poverty, it was suggested that the minimum household expenditure take into account the need for nutritious food, provide low-cost homes at low deposits and ensure estate homes meet minimum living standards.

It was also proposed to enforce laws to protect the native land of indigenous people.

On science and technology, it was suggested that a research and innovation fund be set up, and that a "bio valley" along the lines of Silicon Valley be created to include facilities like universities, research centres, incubation centres and parks.

Regarding education, it proposed an independent quality audit panel to oversee quality in private institutions of higher learning.

It also recommended a Bumiputera education fund to help poor students and to increase the intake of non-bumiputeras into public universities, by giving priority to students who excel in the SPM.

As for national unity, the NECC II recommended unity clubs in all schools and institutions of higher learning.

These were some of the recommendations announced by the NECC II chairman. There were many other more important ones put forward by the council.

Those unrepresented in the council submitted 137 memoranda concerning issues of national concern for deliberation by the various working committees of NECC II.

When accepting the report, the Prime Minister remarked that it would serve as a guide to the Government in planning the nation's development.

All proposals in the report would be given due consideration. He said

the fact that the report was completed through consensus was proof that the different races could work together in discussing issues pertaining to development.

Now that the report is in the hands of the Government, it remains to be seen how many of its recommendations will be acceptable to the Government when formulating its next development policy.

It is by no means an easy task to arrive at a consensus, given the members' divergent views on a wide range of issues concerning nation-building.

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