

FSM: NEM needs mechanism to bring changes

By Joe Leong

KOTA KINABALU: The Federation of Sabah Manufacturers (FSM) says it is timely for the Prime Minister to bring in the New Economic Model (NEM) now because there is so much talk lately about the need to make changes for the nation.

"But transformation will not come about unless you have a well planned mechanism and policy to bring about such changes. That's why we need to formulate the NEM," FSM chairman Datuk Seri Panglima Wong Khen Thau said here in an interview over the weekend.

He pointed out that although the government had announced some aspects of the economic model, it has yet to come out with the actual mechanism for the plan.

"For example, how is the government going to deal with the urban poor, the disparity between urban and rural divide?"

"There's also a need to bring about the narrowing of the gap of the economically poor of certain ethnic groups, because even among the bumiputras there are the rich and the poor."

The FSM chairman pointed out that in Peninsular Malaysia, for instance, the Malays are in a better of position than the Orang Asli.

"In Sabah too, there is disparity. In Sarawak, for instance, the Penans are more backward. Hence, more localized issues need to be addressed and tackled in the process of formulating the NEM," he stressed.

In his opinion, what has been announced so far is quite general and not specific.

He added, "All the motherhood statements are general and the

perception given is good and seems to be comprehensive, but we do really need to come up with a constructive plan that can be implemented pragmatically."

Earlier in the interview, Wong made the observation that the formulation of the NEM is very much linked with the Prime Minister's 1Malaysia concept.

He pointed out that the old concept of parochialism and the thoughts of helping one's own racial group first, "does not help us", adding that such a concept is a hindrance to national progress.

"After the formation of Malaysia for 46 years now, there are still many who can't accept we are of one country. Sabah and Sarawak people are still not being well taken care of.

"There are still grievances. For instance, there are few Sabahans in the foreign service and there are obviously very few of them in high ranking federal civil service.

"This is an area that needs to be rectified. The faster we think we are Malaysians, the better. Irrespective of whether we are Sabahans, we are Malaysians first.

"As a result of the 1Malaysia concept, we need a new economic model that is befitting the new concept.

"In the old, we talked much about priority to certain ethnic groups, like the bumiputras. We are not challenging that, but there are other poor among other ethnic



Wong Khen Thau

groups, like the Indians (in the Peninsular).

"Here in Sabah, we have the hardcore poor. That's why we need the NEM for the government to rectify the poverty situation."

The NEM, he noted, is meant to bring Malaysia to the status of a developed nation by the year 2020.

By doing so, the NEM aspires to make a quantum leap from the current US\$7,000 per capita annum income to US\$15,000 in 10 years.

Wong, however, said that there exists a disparity between the average per capita annual income of those in the Peninsular and those in Sabah where the level is only at around US\$3,000 and US\$4,000.

"This being the case, the Malaysian economy (GDP) has to grow at the rate of seven per cent continuously for the next 10 years. That means the GDP growth for the state of Sabah will have to grow by double digits.

"We have to grow by 15 to 16 per cent annually in the next decade. That is almost impossible, in the case of Sabah," he concluded.

On a more positive note, he added, "At the same time, we should not worry. There is always a way, if there's political will. It's no easy task.

"What the federal government can help is obviously to pump in a lot of money to build up the infrastructure and have more economic activities in Sabah."

He said such activities should include 'revenue oriented' sectors such as tourism, education and aquaculture.



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