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Mahathir-Roundup

DEVELOP CHILD PART COMPONENTS, SAYS PM

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TOKYO, May 18 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants Malaysian companies to acquire the full technology of manufacturing child part components not only for automotive but all industries.

"Japan took 100 years. We want to achieve this in a shorter time, as soon as possible," he told Malaysian journalists at the end of a six-day working visit here.

Dr Mahathir, who departs this evening for the United States for a similar working trip, said his visits to Japan in February and now were aimed at having a first look at developing a components' industry which required high technology.

Asked if local child parts content would be emphasised for the national truck after the Proton experience, Dr Mahathir said it would be emphasised for all and not just the automotive industry.

Dr Mahathir, who witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the truck project between Hicom Holdings, Diversified Resources Bhd and Isuzu Motors Ltd, said while local vendors produced components, like for Proton, they merely manufactured the shell while the child parts inside were imported from Japan.

The production of child parts at home would mean less imports to help reduce the country's current account deficit.

Dr Mahathir said the two MOUs signed by Premier Choice Sdn Bhd with two Japanese mould and die companies here would effect a transfer of technology to build such components.

Premier Choice, mooted by the Prime Minister himself and with Datuk Seri Yahaya Ahmad as chairman, entered into MOUs with plastic mould manufacturers Diki Die and Mould Machinery Co Ltd and Nichiei Seiki Co Ltd.

It went a step further to obtain a stake in Nichiei Seiki in the first significant participation of a Malaysian company in a Japanese corporation.

Dr Mahathir, who visited three factories and met several other Japanese corporate figures, said automation would be vital to Malaysia's manufacturing sector in view of the labour shortage.

As in the production of the Proton car, he said Malaysia was taking an "integration backwards" approach and that was to build the main product first before looking into the manufacturing of the components and then child parts.

"For the automation, we will buy the robot first, then learn how to make one and later, the robot will build other robots," said Dr Mahathir who had visited the Fanuc Ltd robotics plant in Yamanashi.

Asked on his visit to the Kawasaki steel plant in Chiba, he said the failure of Perwaja Steel was no reason to give up on the steel industry of the country.

"The demand for steel has risen to the level where we need to produce steel. Before this, Japanese companies were reluctant to come in because they said Malaysia's requirement was low but now they are willing to become joint-venture partners," he added.

On the foreign participation expected by Malaysia in its Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), Dr Mahathir said foreign companies were not merely asked to provide hardware but also to set bases in the MSC.

"From MSC, they can actually operate their production facilities worldwide using multimedia...they can send their plans, give instructions, where to get what. In other words, we want them to invest in their own

productions facilities in the MSC," he said.

Dr Mahathir made a presentation of the MSC before a prestigious gathering of 400 Japanese corporate leaders on Wednesday after addressing the World Teleport Association annual general meeting on Monday.

The MSC, located within a 600 sq km stretch linking the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Putrajaya and Kuala Lumpur city, will have the latest communications infrastructure.

On whether amendments to communication laws to accommodate the new information era and MSC included the Publications and Printing Presses Act and Official Secrets Act, he said the two Acts were not constraints on the development of the free flow of information.

Instead the laws were a constraint to prevent the press from being used to agitate people with extremist views and to stir up racial or religious feelings.

"It is tenacious writing that we want to avoid, not reporting the truth," he said. -- BERNAMA

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