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NO RESTRICTIONS ON COMPANY OWNERSHIP & JOBS IN MSC, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 1 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says unrestricted import of knowledge workers would be allowed within the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) where there would also be no restriction on foreign ownership over the next 10 years.

These commitments along with several others would be part of a Multimedia Bill of Guarantees for MSC companies, he said when opening the Multimedia Asia '96 conference on the MSC here today.

The Cabinet had set up a Multimedia Development Corporation to ensure MSC companies have the best environment for harnessing multimedia services, he added.

Dr Mahathir said the MDC would have governmental powers but it would be run like a private corporation to serve the MSC companies. Tan Sri Dr Othman Yeop Abdullah's appointment as MDC chairman had been approved, he added.

The MDC would have the mandate as a "one-stop shop" to manage and market the MSC. Applications for companies seeking MSC designation that would entitle them to incentives and guarantees were now open.

They could submit their applications electronically through the MSC homepage on the Internet.

Referring to the Multimedia Bill of Guarantees, Dr Mahathir said multimedia/IT was the priority sector for achieving Vision 2020; MSC would be the home of Malaysia's leading edge multimedia development.

It would have the best environment in Asia by creating MSC specific laws, policies and practices, and also have a world-class physical and information infrastructure, he added.

He said the MSC would become a regional center of excellence in multimedia education, research and leading applications.

It would become a leader in multimedia regulations; cyber-laws for using IT to deliver value in new ways (such as telemedicine, distance learning and electronic signature), and intellectual property protection would be legislated, he added.

He said key MSC infrastructure contracts would be tendered to companies willing to use the MSC as their regional hub; it would offer the best, tailored incentives and financial/venture capital environment.

The incentives for MSC companies were still being detailed, but for companies committing to the MSC within the next year he announced several.

They included corporate tax exemption for 5-10 years depending on the proposed application to be performed within the MSC, and infrastructure contracts would be awarded on a preferential basis to MSC companies.

Multimedia experts and the chief executive officers from foreign countries have been invited to sit on the Distinguished International Advisory Panel, chaired by the Prime Minister, which would provide advice on a continuing basis about the quality of the overall MSC environment.

Dr Mahathir said by the year 2000, he expected to see seven specific applications being developed in the MSC by "webs" of international and Malaysian companies.

First, Malaysia would be a pioneer in electronic government which would be a multimedia-networked paperless administration linking Putrajaya, the country's new administrative centre, to government centres around the country to facilitate inter-governmental collaboration and citizen access to government services, he added.

Second, Malaysia would be a regional centre for telemedicine as rural clinics could be connected to medical experts in Malaysia and to great clinics worldwide using new tele-instrumentns for remote diagnosis.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was a natural hub with its Chinese, Ayurvedic and Western medical knowledge.

Thirdly, he hoped MSC would become a collaborative cluster of universities and corporate research and development (R & D) centres, using distance learning to produce world-class graduates and next generation innovations.

Dr Mahathir also hoped that the MSC would become a remote manufacturing coordination and engineering support hub that electronically enabled companies in high cost countries to access plants across Malaysia and Asia as a virtual extension of their domestic operations.

Next, MSC should become a multimedia customer service hub leveraging Malaysia's unique multicultural links to provide electronic publishing, content localisation, telemarketing and remote customer care to a market of 2.5 billion people.

Sixth, MSC would be an environmentally beautiful and highly convenient financial haven with direct multimedia links to the Labuan International Offshore Financial Centre and the world's financial centres.

Finally, Malaysia would have the world's first national multipurpose smartcard imbedded with individual identification, electronic signature and access to government, banking, credit, telephone, transport and club services.

In short, Dr Mahathir said, he saw the MSC as the leading edge of a new national strategy for Malaysia to achieve the goals described in Malaysia's Vision 2020, and he expected to see a few world-class Malaysian companies emerge from it.

It would also accelerate development of a strong services sector to balance Malaysia's already strong manufacturing sector while helping to improve productivity and quality of life. -- BERNAMA

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