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Panel (Special Report)

DR MAHATHIR TO MEET TOP-NOTCH CAPTAINS OF INDUSTRY ON MSC

By: Salmly Hashim

LOS ANGELES, Jan 12 (Bernama) -- Luck is perhaps on Malaysia's side. Think about it. More than 20 hard-driving presidents, chairmen and chief executive officers of multimillion or multibillion dollar companies will be whisked in their gleaming limos to a pow-wow with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to chart the course of Malaysia's future in the information technology age.

It's easier to gather the leaders of the world to annual economic summits or the United Nations General Assembly. But to persuade these Fortune 500 company CEO's to sit together and throw around ideas on the multimedia super corridor (MSC) for six straight hours is quite an unusual feat.

Dr Mahathir, who will arrive here Sunday with a huge entourage of Malaysian businessmen, will proceed to Stanford University in Palo Alto on Thursday to chair the first meeting of the Multimedia Super Corridor International Advisory Panel (IAP).

These IAP members, specially invited by the prime minister to serve on the panel, are the big boys of business. There's multi-billionaire Bill Gates, founder and CEO of Microsoft, who is "very excited" about the MSC and "committed" to serve on the panel. He's unable to attend this meeting but is scheduled to meet one-on-one with the prime minister on Wednesday and plans to attend other MSC meetings planned during the year. His conviction in Dr Mahathir's exciting vision could very well have persuaded other CEO's to serve on the panel.

But Dr Mahathir's untiring efforts in "selling" the MSC project across the Atlantic and the Pacific must be given credit too. He can be blunt. He can be candid. And he speaks in a language most everyone can understand, making his vision easier to grasp and follow.

The membership of the IAP is impressive. The list of 29 names, led by the prime minister, includes James Barksdale of Netscape, Larry Ellison of Oracle, Louis Gerstner of IBM, Fred Gluck of Bechtel, Nobuyuki Idei of Sony, Bon Moo Koo of LG Group, Noboru Miyawaki of NTT, Eckhard Pfeiffer of Compaq, Lewis Platt of Hewlett Packard, Gary Tooker of Motorola, and Stan Shih of Acer.

Thursday's session is expected to be intensive. Dr Mahathir will kick off the meeting with a speech entitled "Building the MSC to Vision 2020." Multimedia Development Corporation (MDC) executive chairman Tan Sri Dr Othman Yeop Abdullah will follow up with a video presentation on MDC and a speech on "Developing the MSC as a Multimedia Utopia."

There is plenty of opportunity for questions and answers and a healthy exchange of suggestions and concerns. The multimedia companies' strong concern over software piracy, that eats up billions in potential profit, is expected to be discussed.

Microsoft's vice-president for Intercontinental Affairs Orlando Ayala said in a recent interview that the introduction of laws to control piracy should also be followed by strong enforcement of those laws.

Discussions are also expected on Malaysia's proposed cyberlaws, which will cover Computer Crime, Digital Signatures, Multimedia Intellectual Property Rights, and the Telemedicine Development Act.

Focus on the information technology industry by government and industries is only a matter of time. According to PC Week magazine, Southeast Asia, with a population of 414 million and national economic

growth averaging about 8 per cent a year, is one of the most promising emerging markets for computer software and hardware.

About 1.3 million PC's are estimated to be sold in the region in 1996, says PC Week. Unit sales are expected to grow by an average of 25 per cent per year until the end of the decade, according to International Data Corp. "That's hellish growth," Dennis Philbin, IDC's Asia Pacific Director told PC Week.

Meanwhile, the prime minister, who will be accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah MOhamed Ali, has a heavy schedule ahead of him during his week-long working visit to Los Angeles and the Silicon Valley.

In LA , he is scheduled to tour the Todd-AO movie studio, view multimedia technologies by EDS for electronic government, address the Hollywood community, meet and break his fast with the Malaysian community in California at the Al-Khatab Mosque. Dr Mahathir also plans to meet local business leaders and hold a dialogue session with Malaysian students at the University of California in LA (UCLA).

On Wednesday, the Malaysian entourage will head for Stanford University where the prime minister will talk to potential investors and hold a dialogue session with Malaysian students. On Thursday, he chairs the IAP meeting and launches the "Electronic Government." -- BERNAMA

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