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DR MAHATHIR: MALAYSIA TO SIGN ITA IN JULY

By: Salmy Hashim

SANTA CLARA, (California), Jan 18 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will sign in July the Information Technology Agreement (ITA), a multilateral pact to liberalise a wide range of information technology products, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad said here today.

Malaysia did not sign the agreement in Singapore last month when it was negotiated during the inaugural ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation as it wanted to review the provisions of the agreement to see if it would have a harmful effect on Malaysia, the prime minister explained.

He was speaking to Malaysian reporters after meeting top executives of 33 high technology companies, including a large number of Asian-led companies, from the surrounding Silicon Valley at the hotel here where he is staying.

Dr. Mahathir said Malaysia would be ready to "sign on the dotted line" soon, he told Executive Vice-President and Chief Administrative Officer of Apple Computer, George Scalise, during a question-and-answer session after addressing the executives on the proposed Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC).

Furthermore, Malaysia will not impose any duty on the import of multimedia equipment under the Multimedia Bill of Guarantees to companies receiving MSC status from the Multimedia Development Corporation (MDC).

Among the captains of IT industries who attended this morning's session were from Pyramid Technology Corporation, Yahoo and Cisco Systems.

Dr. Mahathir, in response to a question, said the government also planned to review, and if necessary "amend or formulate new laws" to provide venture capital for small and medium-sized companies, especially start-up companies involving multimedia.

In his address, similar to those he made at the University of California in Los Angeles and at Stanford University, he called on Silicon Valley companies to invest in the MSC and "to be our partners in exploring these exciting new frontiers."

Earlier, Dr. Mahathir had one-on-one sessions with six members of MSC's International Advisory Panel (IAP). They include Stan Shih of Acer, Jim Manzi of Nets Inc, Scott McNealy of Sun, Eckhard Pfeiffer of Compaq, Lynton Wilson of BCE, and Reilly Bechtel of Bechtel.

The prime minister, who is heading a delegation of Malaysian corporate leaders and top government officials on the MSC promotion, has ended his seven-day visit to California and will leave for Tokyo on Saturday to continue his mission of promoting the MSC to Japanese IT companies. --

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