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Dr M: Good European response to MSC project

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia was happy with the response from the British and Europe's response to the Multimedia Super Corridor.

The Prime Minister said yesterday he was very encouraged by the enthusiasm shown by British information technology companies and those from continental Europe at the MSC investors conference held here on Monday.

"I was told even companies in places like Hungary and Egypt who did not attend the conference expressed great interest in the MSC," he told an early-morning Press conference in his suite at the Inter-continental Hotel.

After the conference, Dr Mahathir visited the Commonwealth Partnership Technical Management's office.

He said the most significant development following the three MSC roadshows which he attended so far was the fact that it was the most well-known project that Malaysia had ever undertaken.

"I was told that so many people have been talking enthusiastically about it," he said. "In terms of number, there was a lot more people at the London roadshow than the one in California earlier this year."

"Almost 1,000 chief executive officers of IT companies attended the London meeting and this was followed by a roundtable conference with 30 others," he said. "These people are the top of the IT companies here."

Asked if the creation of the MSC could be likened to a country with two economic systems because of the special privileges accorded to it such as special tax holidays and immigration provisions, the Prime Minister said it might appear that way but added the "MSC was a very special project."

There would be a lot of spin-offs from the MSC and if the findings were good and suitable, the country may apply it locally, he said.

He pointed out that the MSC required special kind of workers which explained the flexibility in immigration procedures.

"The MSC needs knowledge workers, not just anybody," he said. "There'll be odd jobs too but the most important would be the specially-trained knowledge workers. It's our intention that more Malaysians acquire the skills to be knowledge workers as well."

Asked if there would be special privileges given to companies which relocate their operations from other parts of the country to the MSC, Dr Mahathir said there would be if they are accompanied by new elements.

"The MSC is not an industrial park. We're looking for high-end information technology companies," he said. "We're not looking for companies to manufacture their products there. As I've said before, the MSC is meant to be a test-bed for IT, for companies to try out their new equipment, for meaningful research."

Asked to elaborate on his earlier statement made at the MSC investors conference that the MSC would be on the agenda at the year-end Asean Summit, the Prime Minister said he would inform his Asean colleagues about the project.

"It is not so much as asking for their participation but rather to co-ordinate the association's work in so far as IT research and development are concerned," he said.

"I'd like to see how we can liaise effectively in this area."

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