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Dr M: MSC mission to United States and Japan successful

Calvin Goh in Tokyo

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday his 10-day visit to the United States and Japan had been successful in making known the Multimedia Super Corridor concept to companies in the two countries.

He said quite a number of them have indicated willingness to participate including Nippon Telegraph and Telephone which had helped to formulate plans for the MSC.

The NTT will be among the first investors. They are particularly interested in the setting up of the Multimedia University and also their own research centre.

Dr Mahathir was responding to questions by Malaysian reporters at his suite at Hotel Okura where he has been staying since he arrived here on Sunday. He was scheduled to leave late last night for Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Mahathir spent a week in the US where he spoke on the MSC to the entertainment and community leaders in Beverly Hills, to investors and students at University of California Los Angeles and Stanford University in Silicon Valley (about an hour's drive from San Francisco), and also at a roundtable dialogue with Silicon Valley CEOs of high technology companies.

He also chaired the first meeting of the International Advisory Panel on the MSC at Stanford University.

The IAP comprises 28 CEOs of global technology companies and international media experts who will advise the Prime Minister on how to create the best possible environment for the MSC.

In Tokyo yesterday, he addressed senior executives of Japanese companies at the investor conference on the MSC organised by NTT and this morning he met members of the Japanese Personal Computer Software Association.

They have also expressed interest in the MSC.

Asked what message he had for the ordinary people with regards to the MSC, Dr Mahathir said although the Government had successfully transformed Malaysia from an agriculture-based economy to an industrial economy and brought about full employment, "we can't ignore developments in the field of Information Technology".

Unless Malaysians took part actively in Information Age activities, they would be left behind in their way of life, their livelihood and even their intellectual growth, he said.

"As a nation which wants to progress in all fields, we can't ignore developments in the field of information technology because if we do so not only will the nation not develop further but the people will be left behind in all fields and their incomes will not rise," he said.

"We want their incomes to rise, to have a better livelihood and quality of life and what we are trying to do in the MSC will concern all Malaysians."

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether he was satisfied with the security aspects and the technology available with regards to plans to have the world's first national multipurpose smart card.

He said they were of course concerned with the security aspect but at the moment the technology was said to be available.

He said as people have been known to hack into computers, "we wonder whether they can hack into the smart card as well?"

He also said that even without the smart card, people who use cash could still be robbed.

Asked how advanced the planning was on the smart card, he said they would try to issue it by next year with only some of the features.

There are two Malaysian companies which could produce smart cards for all purposes, he added.

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