

07/01/1997

ISO 9000 for all govt bodies before 2000: PM

Kamarul Yunus

ALL government agencies and departments have before the year 2000 to qualify for the ISO 9000, the international standards for management and product/service excellence.

The deadline was announced yesterday by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. "I hope the Malaysian public services can become the world's first to implement the ISO 9000 in every level of its administration," he said.

At the same time, Malaysia is expected to become the first to implement the electronic government following the launch of its multimedia super corridor (MSC).

Dr Mahathir said the MSC provides a multimedia-networked paperless administration linking government agencies within Putrajaya to and with government centres nationwide.

"This will facilitate a collaborative government environment and efficient service to citizens and business.

"I was informed that several measures have been taken, including offering information and selecting certain quarters to participate in the pioneer project, design of the network, and, guidelines on the security aspect in using the information technology (IT)," he added.

Dr Mahathir spoke at the Prime Minister's Quality Awards presentation in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, where he also opened a two-day national symposium on ISO 9000.

On the ISO 9000 for government services, he said several countries, including the UK, the US, Finland, Belgium, Switzerland, Canada and New Zealand have used the standards in certain departments and agencies.

In June, the Chief Secretary to the Government issued a circular containing guidelines for the departments and agencies to pursue the ISO 9000, but no timeframe was included. The guidelines were drafted jointly with the International Standard Organisation in Switzerland.

The Chief Secretary to the Government, Datuk Abdul Halim Ali, had said earlier two government agencies have been issued with the ISO 9000 certification from Sirim, while 10 more agencies pending auditing.

The two are the hydrology division of the Drainage and Irrigation Department and Sinagama of the Malaysian Institute of Nuclear Research Technology. Lembaga Tabung Haji, Kuantan Municipal Council, Intan and the Health Ministry's engineering services division are among those waiting to be issued the certification.

"I believe with continuous efforts, (the public sector) can achieve the ISO 9000. They should have the motivation and dedication to achieve the standards," Dr Mahathir told a press conference later.

Asked if the Government expects all its departments and agencies to achieve the ISO 9000 as targeted, Dr Mahathir said: "Yes, we think we can. We are not doing it on a small scale but on the broad front."

Dr Mahathir said applications of the MSC project will also cover the needs of members of the public.

"These include the renewal of licences and the easy communication access among government agencies such as the E-mail, E-fax, E-bulletin board, video conferencing and access to Internet," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the MSC also offers the corporate community such as government's tender, acquisition and information achievement through the "Civil Service Link".

To ensure the success of the project, there are many issues that need to be resolved and managed urgently.

"The project needs a well-planned and effective management structure; the setting up of a special task force; and, effective communication among those concerned with the project," he added.

One of the most important aspects that need to be look into, he said, is the nation's capability of producing skill workers related to the IT that according to him can easily be mastered.

"I am sure the task force has taken into account all concerned issues in its plan. Similar to other major projects, the commitment, assistance and cooperation from every quarters such as the government agencies, private sector and the Multimedia Development Corp themselves are badly needed," he added.

With the introduction of electronic government and paperless concept, Dr Mahathir said the documentation process can be upgraded to ensure the Government can achieve the ISO 9000.

For the private sector, he said, the recognition of the ISO 9000 is precious to them because this will prove that the quality of their management system as well as production, either services or goods, have met the standards requirements.

"This also provides confidence to consumers and clients that their products or services have met quality requirements. Thus, their products or services will be more competitive and can easily penetrate domestic and international markets," he added.

Dr Mahathir added that the quality standards of the private sector can easily be evaluated because they sell their services or products directly to consumers.

"It is difficult to gauge the quality of services provided by government departments and agencies as they are not directly in contact with the public.

"Except for those departments and agencies which provide counter services, it will be difficult to gauge the standards of quality of the departments and agencies. But we can still implement the standards slowly," he added.

To date, more than 100 countries are using the ISO 9000 and more than 50,000 organisations have received the standards certification, including 940 organisations in Malaysia.

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