

21 JAN 1997

MAHATHIR: MSC INVESTORS ASSURED OF LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

By: Leong Koon Choy

TOKYO, Jan 21 (Bernama) -- All companies investing or participating in the Multimedia Super Corridor will operate on a level playing field, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He had explained the rationale and attractions of the multi-billion ringgit, high-tech project to top executives of many of the leading multimedia companies in California and Japan, he told Malaysia newsmen here, at the conclusion of his 10-day mission to promote the MSC.

Asked whether it was true some of the executives had expressed fears that certain companies would be favoured over others, he said it was natural that "everybody wants a level playing field and we subscribe to that."

"That is a natural fear and that is why we have met everybody and explained (the MSC project) to everybody and we have invited all to participate in the International Advisory Panel (IAP)," he said in reference to the 30-member panel set up to advise on the MSC.

Dr Mahathir chaired the first meeting of the IAP -- made up of top names from the multimedia world such as Bill Gates of Microsoft, Louis Gerstner of IBM, Nobuyuki Idei of Sony, James Barksdale of Netscape and Gilbert Amelio of Apple -- last Thursday at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, in the heart of Silicon Valley.

Apart from the IAP meeting and addressing investor conferences for the entertainment industry in Beverly Hills in Los Angeles, the multimedia industry at Stanford and a wide range of top Japanese corporations here, he also held one-on-one meetings with many top executives at all the stops.

This morning, he met a big delegation from the Japan Personal Computer Software Association, led by its chairman Tsukasa Takehara.

In Santa Clara, California, last week, he met a group of executives from mostly Asian-owned multimedia companies.

Asked whether it would be necessary to have meetings of the IAP to be held more frequently than the currently proposed once a year, he said that this might be necessary in the future but for the moment, the views, advice and comments which had been received were "sufficient for us to work on for a whole year."

He also said although many of the companies had indicated their keenness to invest and participate in the MSC, he could not say how many would actually do so but he believed quite a number of them would participate.

He said the most important participant so far was the giant Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation (NTT), the world's largest telecommunications company. Its Senior Executive Vice-President, Noboru Miyawaki, is also an IAP member.

This was because NTT had not only advised Malaysia on formulating the plan for the MSC and participated in the research to determine the parameters and dimensions of the MSC; it had also said it was ready to participate in the project straight away.

Dr Mahathir, who described NTT as "the most important participant in promoting the MSC as well as participating in it," added that the company was particularly interested in being involved in setting up the proposed Multimedia University and in setting up a research and development facility in the MSC.

All the people he met in California had expressed great interest in

participating in the MSC and, to advise Malaysia on implementing it.

In Japan, all the big corporations and software companies had said they wished to take part in the MSC.

Members of the IAP, although set up as an advisory body and not for promoting investment, had also indicated keen interest to participate and it was hoped that "if they take part, others will also take part," he added. -- BERNAMA

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