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MAHATHIR: M'SIA WILL NOT NEGLECT TRADITIONAL MANUFACTURING

By: Syed Jamil Jaafar

TOKYO, March 26 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today assured Japanese investors that Malaysia will not neglect traditional manufacturing as the country goes into information technology and value added industries.

Allaying concerns expressed by some Japanese businessmen who have large manufacturing operations in Malaysia, he said even if a country pursued the development of software, there was still the need for hardware.

"But, the kind of manufacturing that is carried out can employ new techniques developed by multimedia," he told a roundtable meeting of some 100 Malaysian and Japanese businessmen here.

The session, moderated by Institute of Strategic and International Studies chairman Datuk Dr Noordin Sopiee, was organised by the Malaysian Embassy.

Again playing his role as Malaysia's No. 1 salesman, Dr Mahathir explained Malaysia's need to go into IT (information technology) and the background which led to its decision to set up the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC).

He said Malaysia was anxious to progress and become a developed nation by the year 2020.

Although the country had made considerable progress after embarking on an industrialisation programme, trends in the world today showed that manufacturing alone was not enough, he added.

"We decided to go into IT and since, at this stage, no one country seemed to have an advantage over the others in this new area, the playing field is quite level and we feel that we have a chance to make it.

"Of course, we cannot do it alone. We still need inputs from those who are more advanced," he said, inviting Japanese companies to take advantage of the MSC.

During a question-and-answer session, Dr Mahathir said it was part of the plan for the MSC to be linked up with similar zones being developed in other countries such as the Okinawa Special Multimedia District in Japan.

The Prime Minister, who arrived yesterday for a four-day official visit, had a busy schedule today beginning with the official welcoming ceremony at the Akasaka Guest Palace this morning.

This was followed by an audience and lunch with Emperor Akihito at the Imperial Palace.

After attending the businessmen's roundtable meeting, Dr Mahathir witnessed the signing of the supply contract for Kuala Lumpur's monorail system.

He then called on Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto followed by formal talks between the Malaysian and Japanese delegations.

In the evening, Dr Mahathir was feted to a state banquet by Hashimoto at the Prime Minister's residence. -- BERNAMA

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