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MSC key to nation keeping its edge, says PM

Mustapha Kamil in Tokyo

TOKYO, Tues: What happens in the 15km-by-50km Multimedia Super-Corridor (MSC) will have a bearing on the future of Malaysians.

Explaining how the project will benefit all Malaysians, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said principally it would ensure that they are not left behind in the Information Age that is upon us.

He said Malaysia has done quite well in transforming itself from being an agricultural economy to an industrial-based one, in the process achieving full employment, improved standard of living and bigger income.

Speaking to reporters on conclusion of his visit to promote the MSC here, the Prime Minister said the world has moved another step forward - into the Information Age - and Malaysians will now have to adapt to the new development if they do not want to be left behind.

"As a nation wanting to develop in all areas, we cannot put aside development in information technology. If we do so, we will all be left behind and the income and living standards of Malaysians will not increase as we want them to," he said.

On the concentration of efforts to develop the MSC, he said the Government wants to ensure the project's success in a small area first before introducing the multimedia environment to the whole country.

He said the smooth implementation of the project will require the cooperation of the Selangor State Government, landowners and all related government departments.

Dr Mahathir described his visit here and to California, during which he met a number of heads of leading multimedia companies, as a success.

Many companies have shown interest in participating in the project and also in becoming a member of the MSC's International Advisory Panel (IAP).

The Prime Minister chaired the inaugural meeting of the IAP in Santa Clara last Thursday.

In Tokyo, he said a similarly encouraging response was shown by Japanese companies, many of whom are leaders in their respective fields. This morning representatives from Japan's Association of Computer Software Companies, which has some 300 members, met with the Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, companies may apply to be accorded MSC-status from March. The Prime Minister is confident that a fair number would do so.

He said Japan's telecommunications giant, NTT, is one of the most important players in the project, in terms of promoting the MSC as well as participating in its development. "In fact, NTT would like to start now," he said.

NTT has been assisting the Government in formulating plans for the MSC as well as in research conducted on the viability and implementation aspects of the project.

Dr Mahathir said NTT will be among the first investors in the MSC and has also expressed interest to help set up the Multimedia University in addition to its own research and development unit.

Acknowledging that some companies fear the Government might practise favouritism, the Prime Minister said no corporation would be given special treatment.

"We will keep the MSC open to all. That is why we want to meet as many players as possible," the Prime Minister said.

On whether it is adequate for the IAP to meet on an annual basis, Dr Mahathir said for now it is. He said the views, comments and suggestions

given by the international companies at the IAP's inaugural meeting, for example, are sufficient for the Government to work on the project for the whole year.

The Prime Minister also said the visit has allowed the Government to explain why the MSC is an ideal place for the industry to grow.

The corporate chief executives were told that as a country with diverse Asian cultures, the MSC is a good testbed for them to make further headway in the regional market.

Dr Mahathir leaves for home in the evening and is scheduled to arrive in Kuala Lumpur early tomorrow.

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