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PM-Multimedia

MSC WILL IMPACT ALL MALAYSIANS, SAYS PM

By: K.C. Leong

TOKYO, Jan 21 (Bernama) -- The development of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) will impact the lives of all Malaysians and open up vast opportunities for the people, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said it was also vital that the multi-billion ringgit high-tech project be implemented now because the work of government had increased so much that "unless we computerise we (the government) will not be able to work".

He was speaking to Malaysian reporters at the end of a 10-day trip to California and Japan to promote the MSC among some of the world's leading companies involved in the multimedia, information technology (IT) and entertainment industries.

Dr Mahathir, who also chaired the first meeting of the 30-member International Advisory Panel (IAP) to the MSC, described his trip as highly successful in that it generated a very good response and a high level of interest among the top executives he met.

He started the promotional mission in Los Angeles to meet leaders of the entertainment industry -- a vital component of multimedia -- before proceeding to Stanford University in the heart of Silicon Valley for the IAP meeting and to meet some of the biggest names in the IT business.

He arrived here on Sunday to meet executives of top Japanese companies.

Dr Mahathir, who said he had received good views, advice and comments from the people he met during the trip, hoped all parties concerned, including the Selangor government, land owners and government employees, would cooperate to accelerate the development of the MSC.

"All Malaysians will benefit from the development of the MSC, be they workers, skilled or manual, contractors, suppliers of goods and services or anything else," he said.

"Vast opportunities will open up for all with the development of the MSC."

Dr Mahathir said with the world in the midst of a transition from the Industrial Age to the Information Age, the progress of the nation and its people would be stalled unless they participated in the emerging new industries of the Information Age.

He said that 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 the 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 a better quality of life and what we are trying to do in the MSC will greatly concern all Malaysians."

He said such developments were taking place only in the MSC for the moment because the government was using it as a test-bed to determine what developments were suitable or otherwise before expanding the project to the whole country.

This approach was necessary so that any unsuitable aspects of the project could be controlled before being allowed to spread to other parts of the country, Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister also said the work of government had grown very big and that was why it wanted to introduce electronic government, one of the seven "flagship applications" designated for the first phase of the MSC's development.

He cited the example of the number of people seeking passports and visas which had reached 16 million a year.

"Even assuming that only one fourth of that number were involved, the government would have to issue passports and visas to four million people. And that's not counting the foreigners who also want visas, etc," he said.

"The work of government has increased so much that unless we computerise, we will not be able to work, that is, unless of course you want to employ half the population as government servants in order to issue licences to the other half."

Asked whether he was satisfied with the security aspects of the national smart card, another of the flagship applications, Dr Mahathir said the government did worry about such matters although at the moment the technology to ensure security was said to be available.

"But we cannot forget the ingenuity of the crooks because they also have technology. There are people who hack into computers and we wonder whether they can hack into smart card (systems) as well," he said.

He stressed, however, that no single way of doing things was absolutely secure as cash could be stolen or robbed and written documents could be stolen or lost in fires.

Asked whether the smart card, which would be a national identity card as well as a credit card, stored value card, club membership card or for electronic transactions with the government, would be issued by next year, he said the government was trying to do so within this time frame.

However, since there were so many transactions which involved any one person, initially it would be mainly for commercial transactions, he said.

He also said that at least two Malaysian companies had designed smart cards which were able to carry a lot of data and handle a great number of transactions for all purposes. -- BERNAMA

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