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MSC now known worldwide: Dr M

Hardev Kaur in London

LONDON, Fri: No other project initiated by Malaysia has caught the imagination or raised as much discussion and interest as the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC).

More importantly, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said, is the keen interest shown by practically every IT company throughout the world in the MSC.

"In fact I was told that even the German President spoke about it upon his return from Malaysia.

"And everybody I meet from Hungary, Africa, Latin America, all of them want to know about the MSC. Some want to know how we could conceive such an idea," Dr Mahathir told Malaysian journalists here.

The Prime Minister who was here to drum up support for the MSC, the third such promotional tour after California and Japan, held several individual meetings with chief executive officers of Information Technology (IT) companies, a round table conference with some 30 CEOs and addressed a seminar on the MSC at the Imperial College which was attended by more than 1,000 participants.

There was better response in London compared with similar seminars in the US and Japan earlier.

This is because when the first two seminars were held not much was known and not many had heard of the MSC then.

Now it is known worldwide and the CEOs and those involved in IT and multimedia want to obtain more information and more details. He admitted that the response to the MSC may be quite big and perhaps even bigger than the invitation that the country had extended to foreign investments for industrialisation, which was much more gradual.

On the application by existing investors in Malaysia to move into the MSC, such as that by Ericsson, Dr Mahathir said the MSC is not an industrial park for the manufacture of goods. It is more for research and development, training and as a centre for world-wide IT operations to try the latest and state-of-the art equipment such as that for electronic government.

Thus if companies want to relocate into the MSC and bring along with it such changes and technologies then there is no problem, he added.

Asked on the how the "two economic systems - one within the MSC and the other outside the corridor - will function he said the MSC will indeed be a special area, where there will be special privileges which will not be allowed for the rest of the country.

Even though there will be two systems, there will be spinoffs from the MSC which can benefit the rest of the country. However the Government will not wait for a certain period of time before they are adopted in the rest of the country.

"The findings that are advantages and beneficial will be adopted for the rest of the country, we can be quite flexible," Dr Mahathir assured.

During the five days here Dr Mahathir also visited Warwick University which has close cooperation with industries and industry groups, where the research is multi-disciplinary and covers a range embracing both technological and operational innovation.

There are several areas in which Malaysia may be able to learn from the operations at Warwick such as its research in harnessing natural gas that is currently flared off, and research into rare earth and tin tailings.

Dr Mahathir also met Malaysian students who are studying in the Midlands area in the UK. He spoke to a packed theatre of Malaysian students.

Most of the questions from the students were centred on the Malaysian economy, including the financial services, the MSC, what the Government is doing to ensure that there is no degradation of morality with rapid economic development, Malaysia's increasing international stature and its role as spokesman for developing countries of the South.

At the St Mary's Hospital here Dr Mahathir was given an insight into the advances made in telemedicine, and also met the new British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Blair, according to Dr Mahathir, wanted to know about the Far East including China, and whether it will be a problem.

In addition Blair also spoke of the House of Lords which is powerful in Britain and he (Blair) wanted to know how Dr Mahathir had overcome the problem of dealing with the Rulers.

Asked to elaborate on his remarks to the Financial Times that the quota of 30 per cent for Bumiputeras will be relaxed, Dr Mahathir said:

"Even if we have the quota the problem is that we do not have the Bumiputeras. They have too many opportunities and move from one company to another for higher salaries.

"This is not our aim. Our aim is that they should remain in one company ... but they do not see the advantage of doing this. Thus for the MSC, there will be no quotas.

"The quotas and the policy will have no meaning as we do not have the people and those that we have, continue to move from one place to another for short term gains and they do not see the advantage of staying in one place to gain the necessary skills and knowledge."

In any case the Prime Minister said we are opening up and doing away with the quotas for knowledge workers which is a very special category.

Asked when will all the laws pertaining to the MSC be in place, he said that it will take sometime as new laws may have to be promulgated as every now and then Information Technology and development of the multimedia and their impact on society will require new laws.

He later left for Europe to begin his holidays.

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