

17/09/1997

MSC not affected by project deferments: PM

Adeline Ong

THE deferment of some infrastructure projects will not affect the Multimedia Super Corridor because it is principally to be developed by investors, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"There will be no delay to the MSC although some people would like to see a delay," Dr Mahathir said at an open plenary session after officiating the Multimedia Asia 1997 conference and exhibition in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The Government is not putting up much money for the project, which will be largely funded by the companies using the zone as a test-bed for their multimedia applications, he said.

"The private sector will put in the infrastructure... it (the MSC) will not be affected by the problems we are currently facing, which we will overcome anyway," Dr Mahathir added.

"Most of the investment will come from the private sector, including of course the privatized government agencies which are profitable. They will not be dependent upon the Government. So I will not worry on that score," he said.

The 15km by 50km high-tech, multimedia zone stretches from Kuala Lumpur to the new international airport in Sepang, and includes the intelligent city Cyberjaya and the new administrative centre Putrajaya.

Dr Mahathir said the Government is aware that some people still have doubts about the MSC, but then doubts were also raised when the Government adopted the Malaysia Inc concept which is modelled after Japan Inc.

"At one time, Japan was condemned because the Government worked closely with the private sector. But we thought that it was a good idea, so we adopted Japan Inc and made it into Malaysia Inc. Why not? After all, the private sector is doing something that is helpful to developing the nation," he said.

In the case of the MSC, such cooperation is obviously even greater. "We have to ask the private sector to find out what is needed. As a result, a lot of ideas about MSC came from the private sector," the Prime Minister said, adding that in turn the Government gives its fullest support to the initiatives.

"Mere encouragement is not enough. We have to provide the environment for the MSC, including creating cyber laws to govern the whole industry.

"We have to have certain practices of Government modified in order to make the MSC work. For example, we are making special arrangements so that knowledge workers can come in and work, and leave at will, as if they are citizens of this country."

An indication of the Government's commitment to the project is that policies have been drawn up to promote multimedia applications. "That is why we have decided to locate an administrative centre in the MSC, and allow experiments to be carried out on us.

"The Government of Malaysia will be the guinea pig for the whole world to test out how an information age government should be - what kind of systems and technology are needed, and how business is done. We are willing to learn and subject ourselves to trials and errors because we would like to find the best way of governing a country in the information age.

"The Prime Minister of this country has been unofficially appointed as the chief salesman for IT," he jested, to the delight of the participants.

On Malaysians being prepared to fully benefit from the project, Dr

Mahathir said he has always believed that Malaysians have more potential and more capabilities than they think they have.

"When we decided to industrialise, everybody said that this is not possible for Malaysia. We could only grow rice and tap rubber. But we have proven that we can grow more than rice. We now grow crystals and cut them to make money," he said, referring to the production of silicon wafers.

"The switch to high-technology will be slow at first but Malaysians are ready to learn. We are not so proud to say that we can manage it ourselves. That is why we offer the MSC as a test-bed not for ourselves alone, but for the whole world."

In addition, knowledge workers are allowed to work freely within the MSC. "They can come in and out without any hassle. We know that we will learn something from them."

"I find a lot of Malaysians involved in IT companies which are foreign-owned. And they are not just figure heads. They are people with capability and knowledge about the business," Dr Mahathir said.

Citing his visit to the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) as an example, Dr Mahathir said Malaysians have developed many systems and software applications currently in use. He said the system at KLIA which monitors the movement of passengers was designed by Malaysians and this demonstrates that they are capable of handling any problem.

"There is definitely some capacity here which needs to be developed, of course. But everybody all over the world are really beginning at the same point.

"Here is one industry where nobody is ahead. We are all starting anew and we are all experimenting. Malaysians, I think, can experiment just as well as other people," he said, receiving a thunderous applause.

When asked for his impression of Hungary and the role Hungarians can play in the MSC, Dr Mahathir said he was pleasantly surprised by the extent of knowledge on the MSC in Hungary.

"I know that the MSC has been widely promoted and publicised but I did not expect the Hungarian authorities as well as the people in your IT industry to know so much about the MSC."

Noting that Hungary also has plans to use IT in its development efforts, the Prime Minister said: "We have always believed in cooperating with other similar projects around the world. Almost every country, including Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan, have a plan to use IT in development."

There is something to be gained by working together because environments vary country to country, and region to region, which makes the scope for cooperation between Malaysia and Hungary very large, he said.

(END)