

17/09/1997

MSC project won't be delayed, says Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the development of the Multimedia Super Corridor will not be delayed despite various measures introduced by the Government to ease inflationary pressures and reduce the current account deficit.

Dr Mahathir said this was because the MSC was basically an area to be developed by private investors.

He said although the MSC would have the infrastructure, this would be provided largely by the private sector and investors who would want to use the area as their test-bed.

Dr Mahathir said this during a dialogue with participants at the Multimedia Asia 1997 Conference and Exhibition at the Mines Resort City in Sungei Besi.

He was asked whether the recent decision by the Government to delay some projects would have any impact on the MSC and whether the Government would cut down investments and expenditure on information technology.

On Wednesday, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim outlined several additional measures to ease inflationary measures and reduce the current account deficit, including a two per cent cut in expenditure.

Others are deferment of decisions on privatisation of government projects and a review of large purchases of foreign goods by government agencies.

Dr Mahathir said although some quarters would prefer to see the MSC delayed, the Government would not give in.

On Government investment and expenditure on IT, Dr Mahathir said the amount was not that big at the moment.

"For example, we are now looking at the setting up of kiosks to facilitate public dealing with the Government, like in immigration matters. This will be ongoing and will not be cut back.

"At the same time, other expenditure on IT are limited as far as the Government is concerned," he said, adding that most of the investment would be borne by the private sector.

Dr Mahathir was also asked by a foreign journalist whether the toning down of criticisms against foreigners was because Malaysia now recognised that the economy could not be developed without them.

Emphasising that he was not anti-foreigners, the Prime Minister said he was basically against "rogues" wherever they came from, even from within the country.

"There are foreigners and there are foreigners. Some of them are lovely and beautiful, others are horribly ugly. Some are rogues, some are geniuses, some are really friendly people.

"If they are rogues, we will take action against them and we will stop them from coming here. We will not give them visas."

Dr Mahathir lamented that there were some newspapers which just could not bring themselves to report the truth. "I just don't know why. You can tell the truth about us ... We are not beautiful people all the way too.

"We can have pockmarks on our faces. If you come close enough you will see. You can describe the warts and all.

"But when we are doing something right, like growing at the rate of eight per cent, admittedly with foreign investments, we should be left to ourselves.

"We do not want crooks who make billions of dollars, by making Malaysia

20 per cent poorer. And I hope you will tell this to the world..."

To another question on whether Malaysians were prepared to handle the rapidly-developing IT, Dr Mahathir said:

"I have always believed that we have more potential and capabilities than we think we have."

Alluding to the Government's decision to industrialise many years ago, he said the critics then said this was not possible.

Dr Mahathir felt the switch to IT would be slow at first but Malaysians were ready to learn, thus the MSC was regarded as a test-bed not for Malaysia alone, but for the whole world.

"We are making it possible for knowledge workers to work here within the MSC freely, where they can come in and out without any hassle. We know that we will learn something from them."

The Prime Minister then spoke of his visit to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport yesterday adding that various systems and software used at the airport were designed by Malaysians. Although such capabilities needed to be developed further, Dr Mahathir said no country could really claim to have the lead in IT.

"We are all starting anew and we are all experimenting. Malaysians, I think, can experiment just as well as other people."

Asked by a participant from Hungary on the role Hungarians could play in the MSC, Dr Mahathir said he always believed in co-operating with other similar projects around the world.

He reasoned that there would be something to be gained by working together because of the difference in environment between eastern Europe and Southeast Asia.

"Our decision is to work closely with the Hungarian IT industry and the Government itself in order to get them to participate in the MSC, and also for Malaysians or foreigners here to work with the Hungarians to solve problems which may be peculiar to them and eastern Europe."

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