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MSC to take off next month (HL)

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SEREMBAN, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Multimedia Super Corridor would take off next month with the launching of the Multimedia University and the research and development centre of the Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation, a Japanese telecommunications giant.

Describing the response from companies interested in setting up operations at the 15km by 50km MSC as "overwhelming", Dr Mahathir hoped that the groundbreaking ceremony for the university and NTT centre could be held at Cyberjaya next month.

NTT plans to invest in the MSC and provide technical assistance to the various multimedia-related issues.

The company will also make contributions to the university, which is aimed at creating the right workforce and collaborative cluster of academics as well as corporate research and development.

Speaking to reporters after opening the RM2.1 billion Samsung Electronics Seremban Complex at the Senawang industrial area, Dr Mahathir said there had been about 400 inquiries so far from companies wanting to take part in the MSC.

Also present were his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Abdul Samad and wife Puan Sri Hazizah Tumin.

"The MDC (Multimedia Development Corporation) has received many proposals from companies. It will carry out an evaluation to determine whether they are really involved in IT (information technology) before accepting them.

"We do not want ordinary manufacturing companies to set up their operations at the MSC. We want them to use the MSC as the centre for worldwide production," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this when asked whether the response from foreign companies to set up their operations at the MSC was encouraging.

He said these companies could set up their studios, animation processing and production of contents for movies.

Local companies wanting to set up their operations at the MSC, he said, would have to compete with foreign firms, including multinationals, and would not be given special privileges.

Dr Mahathir said it would be open competition between the local and foreign companies dealing with IT.

He said foreign firms would also be allowed to employ as many foreign knowledge workers as they wanted.

"Their employees will be allowed to live in Malaysia for as long as they want without restrictions to their period of stay," he said, adding that this only applied for knowledge workers.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether a special quota would be given to local companies to set up their operations at the MSC which links the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang, the new administrative centre in Putrajaya and the Kuala Lumpur City Centre.

"The locals will not be given a handicap nor a special quota. To us, IT is a new venture. We cannot curb anyone who wants to come in. We can do that when we are finished with the MSC and find that it can be expanded to cover the whole country. Then we can consider a national policy.

"The MSC is an experiment or rather a platform to test our ability to

enter the IT industry."

Dr Mahathir said if a special quota was given to local companies, it would obstruct the inflow of the best technologies from abroad.

He said foreign companies would also not be required to set up joint ventures with locals.

Asked whether proposals from local firms have been received, Dr Mahathir said:

"Local companies have also submitted proposals to set up operations there, although most of them are joint ventures with foreign firms. But there are also independent local firms which are interested and have proposed to set up operations there."

He also said the location plans for residential and commercial areas as well as factories and universities in the MSC were ready, adding that the university would be set up at the centre of Cyberjaya.

Asked whether he was satisfied with the progress of the MSC, he said:

"Yes, I have been given a briefing recently, particularly with regard to electronic government.

"Our first step will be the setting up of electronic kiosks, similar to the automated teller machines, where people can deal with the Government without having to meet the officers."

Citing an example, Dr Mahathir said if someone wanted to renew his driving licence, he could go to the nearest kiosk and input all the necessary data.

"The machine will automatically verify the data and issue the licence."

The Prime Minister also said multinational companies, including Samsung Electronics Group, should consider setting up operations at the MSC.

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