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MSC will be a success, says PM (HL)

Calvin Goh; Zainul Ariffin in San Francisco

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday described the inaugural meeting of the International Advisory Panel on the Multimedia Super Corridor as "very good" with members expressing support for the concept.

"We feel the MSC has received very good support and I am confident it will be a success," he told a Press conference for American and Malaysian journalists at the Littlefield Management Centre at Stanford University, about an hour's drive from San Francisco.

Most of the 22 foreign IAP members - the who's who of the world's IT industry - who attended yesterday's meeting were also present at the Press conference. Six did not attend the meeting because of other commitments.

Dr Mahathir, who had earlier chaired the six-hour meeting, said he explained to the members what the MSC was all about.

He said there were questions on areas which were not very clear.

"But the main thing is their commitment to the MSC not only as advisers... there are indications that they would be investing in the Multimedia Super Corridor as well," he said.

Asked by a US reporter what he felt had been achieved at the meeting, Dr Mahathir said that the groundwork on a number of flagship applications had already been done.

He also said several opinions had been expressed on the kind of work being done and the improvements that could be made. "We feel the results of the discussions are very useful for the Malaysian Government in order to carry out the project," he said.

Concerns expressed during the meeting included a lack of skilled workers and potential trade barriers that might impede marketing efforts in neighbouring countries.

Asked if there would be any changes in the overall plan for the MSC as a result of yesterday's discussions, Dr Mahathir said there would be none.

"But there are some things which we think we can consider by way of improvement in the plan."

He said quite a number of suggestions were made on laws, the infrastructure, policy and training of skilled manpower.

Asked what the Government's concerns were should things not go well, though they may not happen, Dr Mahathir said:

"No risk, no gain. We have to take the plunge. But I feel we are in very safe waters..."

"Besides, we are in very safe hands," Dr Mahathir said, gesturing to the seasoned IT executives at his side.

Asked whether one should be surprised that the man who articulated the Look East Policy should select so many Americans to sit on the panel, he said: "No, you should not be surprised at all. East is still there."

"I keep saying over and over again that when we said we would Look East we also said that we would not stop looking at the West. But that somehow or other was never published."

Those who attended yesterday's meeting were: consultant Kenichi Ohmae, Lester Alberthal (EDS), Ambassador Diana Lady Dougan, Larry Ellison (Oracle), Fred Gluck (Bechtel), Nobuyuki Idei (Sony), Koo Bon Moo (LG Group), Robert Madge (Madge Networks), Jim Manzi (Nets Inc), Scott McNealy (Sun Microsystems), Prof William Miller (Stanford Graduate School of Business);

Noboru Miyawaki (NTT), Philip Odeen (BDM International), Eckhard Pfeiffer (Compaq), Lewis Platt (Hewlett-Packard), Stan Shih (Acer), Masayoshi Son (Softbank), Dean Michael Spence (Dean Graduate School of Business, Stanford), Gary Tooker (Motorola), Lynton Ronald Wilson (BCE), James Barksdale (Netscape) and Robert R. Bishop (Silicon).

The absentees were Bill Gates (Microsoft), Louis Gerstner (IBM), Gilbert Amelio (Apple), Dr Heinrich von Pierer (Siemens Corp), Tadashi Sekizawa (Fujitsu) and futurologist Alvin Toffler.

Their primary responsibility is to provide advice and counsel to the Prime Minister and the Malaysian Government on strategic issues related to the MSC, like infrastructure, environment, policies and cyberlaws, marketing and incentives, and the development of domestic industries.

The MSC is a technology economic development zone measuring 15 by 50 kilometres extending south from Kuala Lumpur designed to attract leading developers of multimedia technologies.

Dr Mahathir said the next meeting of the IAP to review the results would be held in January next year and all present agreed to meet in Kuala Lumpur as it was much easier to see what was going on on the ground.

In the meantime there would be "one on one" meetings either in San Francisco or in Malaysia and if there was a need for certain members to meet to discuss details it could be arranged, he said.

Dr Mahathir, who arrived in the US last Sunday to promote the MSC, will meet Silicon Valley chief executives today before he leaves for Japan where he will address Japanese CEOs.

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