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MSC: Doing away with quotas no cause for concern

Kamarul Yunus

THE Bumiputera Manufacturers Association has described the plan to do away with quotas in the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) as a "courageous move", but said that efforts should not be spared to encourage greater participation of Bumiputera companies.

The reservations expressed by its secretary-general, Encik Abdul Rahman Ibrahim, yesterday may be understandable but there is really no cause for concern.

In his nationwide teleconferencing session on Tuesday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said there would not be any definite programme to boost the participation of Bumiputeras within the MSC.

He did not say that the Government was stopping all forms of assistance to Bumiputera companies in the MSC. In fact, the Prime Minister stressed that the Government would continue to strive for a balance in the well-being of Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras.

"We need to remember that we move together in IT (information technology)... it is not one moving in front and another behind," he had said.

Dr Mahathir said although the 30 per cent quota for Bumiputera participation will not apply within the MSC, the Corridor would provide many opportunities for Bumiputeras to become entrepreneurs, developers, businessmen or workers.

The Prime Minister was expressing his confidence in Bumiputera companies, that they have the knowledge and expertise to make it in IT, and compete in the MSC without the help of quotas.

Dr Mahathir said some Bumiputera companies have even invested RM20 million to buy computers for an up-to-date database and many Bumiputeras are involved in cutting edge technology in the field, citing the example a Bumiputera who was involved in the making of the Jurassic Park movie in Hollywood.

And with the extensive government efforts to enhance computer literacy among students, the younger generation of Bumiputeras will readily accept IT and be well-prepared to compete not only with the other races, but also their foreign counterparts.

Abdul Rahman agreed with the Prime Minister that every effort has to be made to ensure that the MSC project is a success. But he pointed out that if no measures are taken to encourage participation, the Bumiputeras might lag behind the other races as well as the foreigners in tapping the benefits of the IT industry.

He said it is true that many Bumiputera companies are involved in the IT industry. However, most of them have yet to prove themselves in the actual manufacturing of IT products or the provision of knowledge-based services like programming and systems management.

Abdul Rahman also said that the currently established Bumiputera companies, in IT and other sectors, would not have made such great strides if not for the help of the Government through the privatization programme and other policies.

He also said Bumiputera companies' involvement in the IT industry is mainly confined to what others have developed and manufactured, for example in the trading of computers and peripheral products. Based on this, he wonders whether Bumiputeras can effectively compete in the industry.

It appears that Abdul Rahman is aware of the areas in which the Bumiputera IT companies are currently lacking. This can be taken positively in that it is a good place to start to address the weaknesses, and help ensure that Bumiputera participation in the MSC in particular, and IT in general, is both comprehensive and meaningful.

Perhaps, the association should bring these issues up with the relevant authorities. The Government has always been receptive of suggestions and ideas that would bring about an equitable sharing of the benefits of a nation that is growing in affluence as well as influence.

For the time being, Bumiputera companies should reflect on what the Prime Minister had said and strive to live up to and share in the confidence expressed.

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