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PM: Bumis won't need MSC quotas (HL)

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BUMIPUTERA companies have the knowledge and expertise to make it in information technology (IT) and compete in the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) without the help of quotas, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says.

"Bumiputera companies have leapfrogged in the IT field and have the knowledge as well as experienced engineers and programmers.

"There are enough Bumiputera experts in this field and as such there is no need to worry about their participation in the IT sector," Dr Mahathir said during a video-conferencing session participated by some 13,000 people in 28 locations nationwide.

The Prime Minister was replying to a question posed by Encik Mindar Saidi, the village head of Sepang. Mindar wanted to know if the Government had a special programme to provide business opportunities for Bumiputeras at Sepang, which is at the very heart of the MSC.

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

He said there will not be any definite programme to boost the participation of Bumiputeras within the MSC, but the Government will continue to strive for a balance in the well-being of Bumiputeras and the non-Bumiputeras.

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

Dr Mahathir said there are already many Bumiputera companies involved in the IT.

"When I (visited) Universiti Putra Malaysia, I saw exhibits by many Bumiputera companies dealing in IT. Many of these new IT-based Bumiputera companies have joint ventures with foreign companies.

"Some Bumiputera companies have even invested RM20 million to buy computers for an up-to-date database. Their IT knowledge is no less than others," he said.

As an example, he cited a Bumiputera who was involved in the making of the Jurassic Park movie in Hollywood. There are many other successful Bumiputeras in other parts of the world too, he added.

The Prime Minister said the younger generation of Bumiputeras readily accept IT and will be able to compete with their foreign counterparts. "This I found out in my discussions with them. It is not to say that my knowledge in this field is extensive, but I do understand what IT is."

During the two-hour video-conferencing, Dr Mahathir fielded 14 questions on the MSC and related issues.

Penang, represented by Federation of Malaysian Manufacturer chairman (northern branch) O.K. Lee, asked the Prime Minister how the island can complement the MSC.

Dr Mahathir said although companies based in Penang will not be able to enjoy MSC status, their help is needed to develop MSC's facilities such as content centres and design facilities.

"There is a close relation between IT companies based outside and those in the MSC. I am aware that there are companies involved in IT and are suitable for MSC but they are located in Penang. Some of their activities, such as their research and development centres, can be located in the MSC

to enjoy its incentives."

The IT, he said, is a big sector that covers many information-related businesses. These companies, he said, can apply to the Multimedia Development Corp for special privileges.

The Government, Dr Mahathir said, aims to focus on specific IT applications at the MSC before expanding it to other states. "When we open it to include other areas, IT-related companies in Penang can take advantage of the incentives, if they are still in place."

The Prime Minister was also asked if the MSC will provide opportunities for non-IT related firms; after all, the MSC would be just like any other industrial town and has a population of 150,000 people who need food, housing and entertainment.

"Non-IT related businesses such as developers, builders, taxi drivers will be needed in Cyberjaya and the other packages in the 15km by 50km area.

"Do not think that we do not give place to other businesses. They can continue their work as usual," he said.

In Ipoh, a participant asked Dr Mahathir how long the country would have to rely on foreign labour for the MSC project.

Dr Mahathir said the process of importing foreign expertise will continue as the country needs to learn from the experts. He urged Malaysians not to be ashamed that "we have to seek technological advice from the experts as we are in a learning process".

"For example, we want engineering expertise to make a car... we need not invent it ... they show us how it is done and we improve on it.

"After getting the technology, we may explore its uses on our own. We must admit that we need help. The Japanese used Western technology too," from which they developed their own products, the Prime Minister said.

"The MSC will use foreign experts as long as we need to learn... people come here to learn from us too. They study our development model," he said.

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