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PM: MSC designed to meet new needs

Hardev Kaur in London

LONDON, Tues: The Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) offers participating companies an environment not hamstrung by policies but one that is flexible enough to accommodate a whole new set of businesses, practices and technologies.

On the third stop of his "odyssey to drum up interest and support" for the MSC, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad expressed confidence that European companies active in the field of Information Technology (IT) will respond well to the project.

He said Malaysia is quite conscious that it is not a master of leading edge technologies, and that it needs advice in preparing the necessary infrastructure for the MSC in view of the many special needs of the multimedia and Information Age.

In a speech on "MSC: A Global Bridge from Europe to Asia for The World Century" at the Imperial College here, he said: "We need your advice and your help. We need of course your investments, which will benefit us and will benefit you as well... Malaysia is prepared to listen and act on it."

For this, an International Advisory Panel (IAP) with big names from America, Europe and Asia has been assembled. Dr Mahathir said he is sure that European companies, like their counterparts in America and Japan, are ready to take up the opportunities and the challenges at hand.

To date, some 1,000 serious enquiries have been received, and 30 major players are among those who have committed to participate in the MSC. Many have booked sites for their facilities and are already involved in the structuring of the MSC.

Describing the MSC as the "most comprehensive test-bed devised for the purpose of learning and testing technologies and their applications in the Information Age", Dr Mahathir said:

"We are not developing the MSC just for ourselves. It is our contribution to the World Century of the Information Age.

"We are not being altruistic. There is a lot in this project for us but there is also a lot in it for everyone... (it is) truly an exciting experiment... that has stirred up worldwide interest within the industry and outside".

The MSC will create innumerable business opportunities and offer participants the chance to help shape "an Information Age society", but like all new things its impact may not be entirely positive and a new field of study is required to look into the social and psychological changes the Information Age will bring about.

To date, seven flagship projects - which include the electronic government, a multi-purpose smart card and tele-medicine - have been initiated.

In addition, projects such as the new administrative capital of Putrajaya, the Cybercity which will house research and development facilities, operational headquarters of multinational corporations; and a multimedia university are under way.

Those on the IAP are enthusiastic about the vision as they see Malaysia is serious about removing the obstacles that Industrial Age policies, laws, practices and attitudes had posed for them. They are also excited about the holistic way Malaysia proposes to go about achieving this.

Dr Mahathir said a reflection of the Government's commitment is the 10-point Multimedia Bill of Guarantees as well as the various MSC-specific

incentives and facilities that will be offered.

While the Government has always been "business friendly", the Prime Minister stressed that "we are going to be even more friendly to those who participate in our MSC" in terms of manpower recruitment, ownership, no censorship, reduced bureaucratic procedures, and faster approvals for the few official requirements.

Dr Mahathir said the Information Age should result in "a greater world civilisation than any we have known in the past".

"But much depends on our understanding of the new age," he said, and the MSC is an opportunity to study these changes.

"The Century of the World" will be an "Age of Connectivity between peoples, places, information and ideas", Dr Mahathir added.

Mutual enrichment is possible through the shared creation of values by means of "webs" of alliances among organisations which will collaborate across borders, unaffected by distances, to generate increasing returns as more and more partners and customers join the ever-expanding webs.

This is possibly the new model of development, Dr Mahathir said. "Unless we are flexible and responsive to changes in technology, industry structure, and consumer preferences, we will be bypassed."

In a knowledge-based economy, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship represent a scarce resource which cannot be confined within borders. "Every country and all of the world's peoples should have access to competitive advantages of every kind everywhere," he said.

Four fundamental forces are emerging to drive the globalisation process, Dr Mahathir said. They are a massive communications network that disseminates real-time information all over the world; truly global capital that needs market discipline which transcends all boundaries; companies aspiring to be global market leaders with operations wherever it is economical and rational to produce, distribute and market; and consumers whose taste for, and knowledge of, the world's best will determine what they buy.