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PM: MSC a test bed in real-life society

Rashid Yusof in Budapest

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Multimedia Super Corridor marks a way to try out life in the information age, where changes are expected in society, business and in relations between countries.

The Prime Minister said experiments on the effects of the latest technology in telecommunications and multimedia would be carried out at the MSC in a "real-life society".

He said companies could test new systems with a real and electronic Government.

In presenting the MSC as a "huge test bed", a place of some relevance to future society, Dr Mahathir spoke of how trading, communication and daily chores would enter a stage where they could be conducted without any human contact.

The Prime Minister sketched an overview of the likely changes to a group of Hungarian businessmen here on Tuesday.

"What sort of society will there be if we all get up in the morning and sit in front of the computer and do all our work, and our business with that computer?"

Dr Mahathir envisaged purchases of daily needs, business operations and running of a distant factory through the computer, directed from home, thus doing away with any human contact, except through the computer.

"There will be no human interface, and it could change society."

Through a test-bed in a real-life society, Malaysia will enter the information age with the full knowledge of the impact that it will have on society.

This will enable the country to make full use of the massive amount of information to be available, mindful of the pitfalls without proper experiments, he added.

Dr Mahathir spoke off-the-cuff in one of the stately rooms at the Parliament Building, the venue of much of the Prime Minister's programme here.

He later took questions from the floor.

Present was Hungarian Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism, Szabolcs Fazakas.

The Hungarians reacted warmly to the Prime Minister's presentation. One called it a "new thinking, different from the normal way of thinking in Hungary".

The Prime Minister also outlined how the experiment of the information age society would take place vis-a-vis the MSC, such as through the Government providing the soft infrastructure, making available all the facilities to companies wishing to try out new systems, through an electronic Government.

Malaysia was not out to make money out of the multimedia companies setting up their headquarters or research facilities at the MSC, but to make it a "great test-bed" for all kinds of new ideas, the latest in telecommunications and multimedia.

"This was in order to find out how they will work within a real-life society," he said.

In order to facilitate research, the Government will provide an administration that is very friendly towards business particularly those involved in the MSC. It would be as helpful as possible, he assured.

Dr Mahathir briefed the Hungarians on all key aspects of the MSC, like

the smart card, multimedia university, telemedicine and cyber cities.

The Prime Minister later visited the Videoton Holding and Ikarus Vehicle Manufacturing Holdings at Szekesfehervar which used to produce 13,000 buses a year and now believes it could do better through capital injection and upgrading.

Speaking to Malaysian journalists at the end of his two-day visit, Dr Mahathir said he saw major changes in the country compared to his last visit here in 1987, with businesses now sprouting.

"We believe there are many opportunities here; we can make this as a gateway to the Balkan states."

He said on tourism, there were possibilities in the hotel industry, and to bring tourists to the country, including people of Hungarian origin in Australia.

He added that Hungarian companies had offered to work with Malaysian firms in Bosnia as they had skilled workers, and engineers who might be needed for such projects.

Dr Mahathir said considering that Malaysia lacked manpower, this tie-up was a possibility.

On Hungary's plan to privatise its carrier, Malev, Dr Mahathir said it was up to Malaysian companies how they wanted to participate in its privatisation.

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