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PM confident of MMA nod for telemedicine

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SANTA CLARA, Thurs: The Malaysian Government is bullish of the telemedicine concept being accepted by the local medical fraternity.

Saying this today, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he is confident the new practice in the medical field would be endorsed by the Malaysian Medical Association, although certain matters would have to be ironed out first.

He was answering a question from the floor after giving a talk on the Malaysian Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project to a group of investors and students at the Stanford University.

Telemedicine is one of the seven applications which would first be introduced in the MSC to act as catalysts for growth in other multimedia activities.

Using on-line services provided in the MSC environment, doctors hooked-up to the network from around the world will be able to interact with each other on real time basis. The idea is to use such interactions for medical purposes such as remote diagnosis and therapy.

Appropriate laws under the now-drafted sets of cyberlaws will make the practice legal.

Dr Mahathir, who arrived here from Los Angeles earlier yesterday, also called on Malaysian experts now based overseas to return to serve within the MSC.

"We welcome both foreign-based Malaysians and also overseas experts to come to participate in the project," he told the hall packed with an audience of more than 300.

He added overseas-based Malaysians who are no longer Malaysian citizens can come to work as expatriates.

"We got no hang-ups on such matters," he said.

On competition, while acknowledging neighbouring countries can also offer stiff challenges to the project, the Prime Minister outlined the clear advantage of the MSC project.

He pointed out that the MSC does not involve adding new concepts to existing facilities but is an entirely new project that will use the latest in technology.

Dr Mahathir also outlined the cost-advantage offered by Malaysia compared to the other "tigers" in the region.

To sustain this, he said the Government will continue to provide an environment conducive for investments.

He later invited the attending Stanford University students to submit their resumes and fill in the employment applications in the MSC website.

Describing the project further, the Prime Minister said it will eventually be extended throughout Malaysia and involve not only financial commitment but also those of Malaysians in changing the way they live and work.

Dr Mahathir was also asked how the freedom the Government has promised in access to the Internet will affect Malaysians.

He explained that it is almost impossible now to censor materials flowing on the Internet as fast as a new way is discovered to do so, another way would be found to get around it.

One day, he added, perhaps the world would come up with an international code of ethics for the Internet and that Malaysia would follow such a code.

In his earlier speech, he said the area will be a global test-bed for new roles of Government, new cyberlaws and guarantees, new way of collaboration between Government and companies, education and delivery of healthcare.

For example, he said the Government no longer require multimedia companies to go through the traditional Request For Proposal (RFP) process that requires the authorities to have clear concept of what the company must deliver.

"Leading companies have told us that this was inappropriate for new areas of multimedia since the solutions are developed rather than assembled from existing knowledge," he said.

Instead of the RFPs, the Government will ask companies for concept proposals to describe the approach they would take in developing solutions or achieving the benefits desired by the Government.

The Prime Minister's visit to California will reach its peak today with the inaugural meeting of the International Advisory Panel (IAP) to the MSC project. The IAP members are due to arrive here today for the meeting where outstanding issues would be discussed.

Since his arrival, Dr Mahathir's talks have received overwhelming response, with packed halls each time he speaks.

Company executives have shown interest in the project by the questions asked after each session. These questions range from the project itself to the Malaysian economy.

Earlier yesterday, Dr Mahathir had a private meeting with Microsoft chairman Bill Gates.

In the afternoon, he met Netscape Communications Group president and chief executive, Mr James Barksdale and the Cisco group chairman Mr John Chambers.

Details of the meetings were not made available immediately.

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