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PM to meet industry giants' leaders on MSC

Mustapha Kamil in Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES, Sun: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's arrival here today will effectively flick on the switch to Malaysia's ambitious Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project.

After months of planning, the project will move closer to realisation with observers saying the programme for his visit here "has not quite been attempted before in the electronics and communications industry".

The first meeting of the MSC's International Advisory Panel (IAP) will mark the first time that so many captains of the industry, many of whom are rivals, will sit in the same room to discuss a common project.

The Prime Minister is expected to announce the composition of the panel during his visit here.

The MSC - a 15-by-50 km zone stretching from the Kuala Lumpur City Centre to the new administrative centre of Putrajaya and the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang - is specifically aimed at housing companies that develop and use cutting edge multimedia technologies.

The MSC will be equipped with a high-capacity global telecommunications and logistics infrastructure, at the centre of which is a 2.5-10 gigabit optic-fibre network.

The project will also involve the enactment of new laws to encourage electronic commerce, development of multimedia applications, and to protect intellectual property rights.

Also conceived for the MSC are carefully planned "intelligent" working and living environments conducive for creative activities.

The IAP meeting on Thursday will discuss, among other things, its role in the development of the MSC. There will also be discussions on cyberlaws and "soft infrastructure" required for the project.

In addition, issues related to the development of an electronic government are expected to feature in the meeting.

It is understood that the Government wants to see at least seven multimedia networks in operation in the country by the year 2000.

Apart from an electronic government, the six other flagship applications are telemedicine, smart schools, research and development clusters, worldwide manufacturing webs, borderless marketing centres and a revolutionary national multi-purpose card.

While details of the national smartcard project has yet to be announced, it is believed to involve the development of a single all-purpose identification card that will do away with the need to carry a multitude of cards and identification papers.

Serving to speed up MSC's development is an attractive package of fiscal incentives, backed by the Malaysian Government's Bill of Guarantees, that will be awarded to companies operating within the corridor.

During his visit, Dr Mahathir is also expected to be engaged in several closed-door meetings with American corporate chief executives. He will also witness signings of a number of memorandums of understanding between Malaysian and American parties.

Bername reports: Multi-billionaire Bill Gates, founder and CEO of Microsoft, is unable to attend the IAP meeting but is scheduled to meet one-on-one with Dr Mahathir on Wednesday. He also plans to attend other MSC meetings planned during the year.

The membership of the IAP, which will be chaired by Dr Mahathir, is expected to include James Barksdale of Netscape, Larry Ellison of Oracle,

Louis Gerstner of IBM, Fred Gluck of Bechtel, Nobuyuki Idei of Sony, Bon Moo Koo of LG Group, Noboru Miyawaki of NTT, Eckhard Pfeiffer of Compaq, Lewis Platt of Hewlett Packard, Gary Tooker of Motorola, and Stan Shih of Acer.

Dr Mahathir, who is accompanied by wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, has a heavy schedule ahead of him during his week-long working visit to Los Angeles and the Silicon Valley.

In Los Angeles, he is scheduled to tour the Todd-AO movie studio, view multimedia technologies by EDS for electronic government, address the Hollywood community, and meet and break his fast with the Malaysian community in California at the Al-Khatib Mosque.

Dr Mahathir also plans to meet local business leaders and hold a dialogue session with Malaysian students at the University of California.

On Wednesday, the Malaysian entourage will head for Stanford University in Palo Alto where the Prime Minister will talk to potential investors and hold a dialogue session with Malaysian students. On Thursday, he chairs the IAP meeting and launches the "Electronic Government."

Among others in the Prime Minister's delegation are Chief Secretary to the Government Datuk Abdul Halim Ali and Finance Ministry Secretary-General Tan Sri Clifford Herbert.

From the US, Dr Mahathir will visit Japan before leaving for Kuala Lumpur on January 20. He is scheduled to address Japanese chief executive officers on the MSC and to hold discussions with selected industry players in Tokyo.

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