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Stepping into the future via MSC (HL)

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MALAYSIA has no choice but to prepare itself for the future when the use of information technology (IT) will be the norm and the country will not be able to do without multimedia.

In view of this, the Government is forging ahead with its plans to prepare the people for the Information Age with the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC).

In saying this, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad stressed that the people must accept the fact that the IT revolution is irreversible.

"Whether we like it or not, it will be here... so we have to make preparations. We have to accept the reality that this will be the future trend... the more prepared we are in handling it, the better protected we will be. We cannot stop this process.

"We cannot curb the entry of information, for instance, by stationing troops at the borders... so we have to look for ways to manage the information to our advantage. That is why we have placed great importance on the MSC so that we will know how we receive, distribute and use the information to our benefit."

Describing the project - which has fired the imagination of leading players in the US and Japanese multimedia industries - as an experiment to test the country's ability to enter the IT industry, Dr Mahathir said trials will be conducted on all aspects of the impact of IT on society.

The MSC, covering an area of 15km by 50km between the Kuala Lumpur International Airport and Putra Jaya in Sepang and the Kuala Lumpur City Centre, is the world's first in terms of facilities, government support, application, policies and focus. It is expected to take off next month with the launching of the Multimedia University and the research and development centre of the Japanese telecommunications giant Nippon Telephone and Telegraph (NTT).

In a special programme "Bersama Perdana Menteri" over RTM last night, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia must take the opportunity to advance in IT now when it is still in its developmental stage so that the country will not lag behind the developed countries.

"If we do not take this opportunity, we will be left behind and it will be a daunting task for us to catch up," he said, adding that the MSC is a window of opportunity for the country to tap the knowledge, resources and wealth of the developed countries to boost its own development.

Malaysia cannot afford to wait because once lost the opportunity will not come by again, he said.

The Prime Minister noted that Malaysia is much more advanced than most other developing countries but it is still behind the industrialised nations in the computer field.

But then even among the developed nations, there are some which are not as advanced as others and Malaysia should not take the necessary steps to move ahead.

Asked whether the Government has prepared the people to capitalise on the technological advances, Dr Mahathir said: "We are doing it in stages. Everyone realises the existence of the MSC... it has become a broad topic of discussion but the understanding is not deep enough.

"In fact, there are people in other parts of the world, including in the developed countries, who do not understand such developments."

The Government will strive to improve the people's knowledge and understanding of the project.

On the involvement of foreign multimedia experts in the MSC and whether they will use it solely to their own advantage, Dr Mahathir said: "We are in a borderless world... Malaysia will still be affected by the things they produce elsewhere.

"They can do whatever they want from somewhere else and we will gain nothing... so it is better for them to come and invest here. Our people will have jobs, learn from them and the country can develop further..."

On how the Government plans to minimise the project's risk of failure, Dr Mahathir said if the Government is afraid to take risks, the country will not succeed.

"No risk, no gain," he said, drawing attention to the Government's decision to launch the national car project in the 1980s.

"When we decided to produce Proton cars, a lot of people said that this was not the job of a developing country like Malaysia... but now everybody says that the car is good."

On the relevance of the MSC to the Malaysian society where some sections are still poor and may not be ready for such developments, Dr Mahathir said the Government is continuing with its work to eradicate poverty. But this should not mean that efforts to usher the nation into the Information Age should be stopped or postponed.

"If we are to wait for everyone to be on an equal level, or possess the same strength and wealth, then we may have to wait forever. While attention is given to eradicating poverty, we also have to take note of developments taking place all over the world which will affect us, which we cannot escape from."

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