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Mahathir-Gates

BILL GATES TO PROVIDE "MAXIMUM INVESTMENT" IN MSC, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Microsoft chairman and CEO Bill Gates has pledged his commitment to the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) and will offer "maximum investment" in the project.

Dr Mahathir said Gates was also very interested to participate in the country's education programmes especially in smart schools, universities and training of Information Technology (IT) workers.

Speaking to reporters after a 40-minute meeting with Gates at his office here, the prime minister said Gates would provide "maximum support" for the education programmes.

Asked how much fund Gates has given to these programmes, Dr Mahathir said: "He has given some money."

Dr Mahathir said Gates would announce the matter later.

Gates had earlier met the Malaysian Cabinet at the Prime Minister's Department where he briefed them on the electronic government concept.

The 42-year old who topped the Forbes list of richest men for 1996 and 1997 from his world-wide software empire, spoke on the "Digital's Nervous System in the Government".

Dr Mahathir said Gates also briefed him and the Cabinet at length on the Generic Office Environment (GOE), one of the applications in the electronic government concept being proposed by Microsoft.

Electronic government is one of the MSC's seven flagship applications to be implemented at Putrajaya, the new federal administrative capital outside Kuala Lumpur, aimed at enhancing public service performance through the use of information-based technology and multimedia.

"He (Gates) is ready to cooperate, he will give maximum investment here both for the GOE as well as his commitment to the MSC," the prime minister said.

Asked by a reporter whether this meant that Gates would be coming to Malaysia more often, Dr Mahathir said: "Of course if the GOE goes to Microsoft, he's going to be here very often."

Dr Mahathir said in implementing the electronic government flagship application, the government had to exercise very careful evaluation.

"We don't want to walk out the people completely by making a choice that may make it impossible for participation by a lot of people.

"So, we have asked him to give a clearer explanation about what can be done. Because this is something new, the technology is changing very rapidly, so, if we are not careful we may suddenly find ourselves unable to progress," he said.

The prime minister said Gates had also asked whether the country's current economic crisis would affect the MSC project.

"We explained to him that we have given the MSC the priority. So, that is not going to affect at all," he said.

The MSC, a 750 sq km area extending south of the Kuala Lumpur City Centre to the KL International Airport in Sepang, is designated as a hub for the development of multimedia products and services.

Gates, a member of the MSC International Advisory Panel, who was on a one day-visit here, also addressed some 3,000 people at a Microsoft conference on "the Connected Community" at the Putra World Trade Centre. --

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