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#### 5 working committees to study IT-related matters

Kamarul Yunus

THE National Information Technology Council (NITC) has set up five working committees to study problems and challenges pertaining to information technology (IT).

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who disclosed this yesterday, said the committees will carry out indepth studies to seek solutions to IT-related problems as the country enters the next millennium.

Speaking to newsmen after chairing the NITC meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, Dr Mahathir said the five committees are E-public services, E-community, E-learning, E-economy and E-sovereignty.

Dr Mahathir said the 26-member NITC also discussed the progress of IT in the country, particularly the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project.

On the MSC, the Prime Minister said the progress of the project is ahead of schedule and is not affected by the capital control measures implemented on September 1.

"We have seen progress, more than what we expect and ahead of our target, in terms of investments and developments," he added.

Meanwhile, Multimedia Development Corp executive chairman Tan Sri Othman Yeop Abdullah said there are currently 175 MSC-status companies with total investments of about RM3 billion. Of these companies, 109 are already operational.

"Our initial target is to have 200 MSC-status companies by 2000. But it appears that we will exceed that target," he added.

On "Virtual Commonwealth", a video conferencing involving several world personalities, Dr Mahathir said the purpose is to bring people from various countries to discuss the future of the world.

"We want to bring people together to talk like reasonable human beings, about the future of this world. So we will have tele-conference and we will discuss with responsible people about real things ... about the truth and the future of this world, the advent of IT and all that," he added.

Led by the Prime Minister himself, the video conferencing will involve an on-site panel and world personalities. Scheduled to be launched this Tuesday, "Virtual Commonwealth" will link Kuala Lumpur with Brussels (Belgium), Geneva (Switzerland), Washington D.C., Cambridge and New York in the US.

Foreign participants at the video conferencing are World Bank vice president of East Asia and Pacific Mr Jean-Michel Severino, European Commissioner for Industrial Affairs, IT and Telecommunications Mr Martin Bangemann, UN Conference on Trade and Development secretary-general Mr Rubens Ricupero, Dr Joseph S. Nye of Harvard University and Mr Brian Urquhart, a Scholar-In-Residence at the Ford Foundation, International Affairs Programme in New York.

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