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Gates reaffirms support for MSC (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Microsoft chairman and CEO Bill Gates had reaffirmed his commitment to the development of technology and the Multimedia Super Corridor, and would offer maximum investment in the project.

Dr Mahathir said Gates was also very keen to take part in the country's information technology education programmes, especially in Smart Schools and universities and the training of IT workers.

"He said he would provide maximum support (in these areas)," he told reporters after a 50-minute meeting with Gates at the Prime Minister's Department.

Both later launched the Malaysian Young Programmers Club (MyPC), a project aimed at discovering and nurturing young programming prodigies. It is initiated by the New Straits Times Sdn Bhd, Microsoft Malaysia and Brave and Bold Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of Patimas Computers Bhd.

Asked on the size of investment pledged by Gates, Dr Mahathir said:

"He has given some money. He will announce it but I think he will go beyond that."

Gates has pledged to invest RM1 million in software and training resources for MyPC over the next three years.

Later this afternoon, he pledged another RM1 million to Malaysia's Smart School project.

The contribution will be in the form of computer hardware and software as well as training for 1,000 teachers who will be teaching in the 90 Smart Schools from next year.

Gates, a member of the International Advisory Panel to the MSC, is here to attend the one-day Microsoft Connected Community Conference: Technology for Government, Business, Education and Societies at the Putra World Trade Centre.

The IAP now comprises 41 members, up from the 29 when its first meeting was held in January last year at Stanford University in California. The second meeting was held last month at Cyberjaya in Sepang.

Other notable members of the panel, which reads like a who's who of the international information technology industry and related fields, include Motorola chairman Gary Tooker; Nippon Telegraph & Telephone president Jun-ichiro Miyazu; Acer chairman and CEO Stan Shih; Hewlett-Packard Company chairman and CEO Lewis Platt; Compaq Computer Corporation CEO Eckhard Pfeiffer; IBM CEO Louis Gerstner; Sun Microsystems chairman, president and CEO Scott McNealy; Sony Corp president and CEO Nobuyuki Idei; Alcatel Alstom chairman and CEO Serge Tchuruk; Ericsson chairman and CEO Dr Lars Ramqvist and NEC chairman Dr Tadahiro Sekimoto.

On the briefing by Gates to the Cabinet on the electronic government concept earlier, Dr Mahathir said Gates gave an extensive explanation.

"We discussed his proposal on electronic government. We have to make a very careful evaluation because we do not want to lock out people completely by making a choice that may make it impossible for participation by the masses (in dealing with the Government).

Dr Mahathir said this was necessary as the concept was something new and the technology changed very rapidly.

"If we are not careful, we may suddenly find ourselves unable to progress."

The electronic government concept, one of the seven flagship

applications under MSC, aims to increase productivity and competitiveness by transforming administration processes through the use of multimedia and information technology.

Called the generic office environment project, it is designed to wire up government offices to create an on-line network using Internet technology.

On the effect of the economic problems on the MSC, Dr Mahathir said Gates wanted to know whether the project would be affected.

"I explained to him that the MSC had been given priority, so it would not be affected at all."

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