

16/01/1998

Gates requests special meet with PM in March

Kamarul Yunus

BILL Gates, who is a member of Malaysia's International Advisory Panel (IAP) for the Multimedia Super Corridor, has asked to meet Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in March.

The Microsoft chairman and chief executive officer is seeking the meeting because he will not be available for the second meeting of the IAP scheduled for next month.

In dismissing a suggestion that Gates has lost interest in the IAP for the MSC project, Dr Mahathir said he has received a letter from the former to confirm his absence from the IAP meeting but requested for a special session with the Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir is also the chairman of the IAP for the MSC project.

"I got a letter from Bill Gates only recently ... the letter says that he will not be attending (the IAP meeting) but will be coming a month later.

"He (Gates) will be coming in March instead ... he wants to have a special session. So that is okay with me," Dr Mahathir told reporters after chairing the Sixth National Information Technology Council (NITC) meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The second IAP meeting is scheduled to be held in Cyberjaya on February 12.

The inaugural IAP meeting was held in California in January last year, whereby 22 out of the original 28 IAP members attended.

For the next IAP meeting, Dr Mahathir said so far, only 17 of the 41 IAP members have confirmed their participation but he believed that there is still time for the other members to confirm.

"We don't expect every IAP member to attend. Since the IAP is a very big family, we will not be able to get the whole lot of them to attend at any one time.

"However, they do come to see me, even those who did not attend the inaugural IAP meeting in California last year.

"Subsequently, they have come to see me and we have been having sessions with them throughout the year to discuss the MSC.

"They are still functioning as advisers although they may not be able to attend the full IAP meeting. It does not mean they have lost interest ... it is just that their time-table does not permit them," he added.

Dr Mahathir also reiterated that the MSC project is not affected by the current economic problem in the country and is progressing well.

"What we are putting in is merely the infrastructure and basic facilities ... the rest will be borne by investors who will take up spaces at the MSC," he added.

However, Dr Mahathir said he has yet to receive an update of the MSC as it was not part of the briefing during the NITC meeting yesterday.

On another development, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia will host the second World Bank Global Knowledge conference next year.

NITC permanent secretary Tengku Datuk Dr Azzman Shariffadeen said the World Bank has asked Malaysia to host the conference due to the country's, especially Dr Mahathir's, initiative to develop the MSC.

"They (World Bank) want a developing country to host the next event. Because of our country's prominence and the MSC initiatives, Malaysia is seen as the appropriate country.

"So, we have accepted to be the host," he said, adding the first such

conference was held in Toronto, Canada in June last year.

On the NITC meeting, Dr Mahathir said the members discussed six reports submitted by several NITC task forces.

The six areas discussed were people development; info-structure development; application development; NITC operation; system networking and integration; and the "millennium bug" problem.

On the "millennium bug" or "Y2K", Dr Mahathir said while the Government and major companies are trying to tackle the problem, the small- and medium-scale industries entrepreneurs apparently do not seem to be doing anything.

"I am expected to tell people that there is this 'millennium bug' problem. Where government records are concerned, the bug is being tackled.

"The problem is also being tackled by big companies but we fear the small companies such as the SMIs are not focussing or not doing anything about it.

"If they don't, they are going to get into very serious trouble once we cross 1999 into the year 2000," he added.

(END)