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MICROSOFT'S INVESTMENTS IN REGION NOT AFFECTED BY ECONOMIC TURMOIL

KUALA LUMPUR, March 18 (Bernama) -- Microsoft Corporation's investments in the region will not be affected by the economic turmoil as the investments are long term in nature, says its chairman and chief executive officer Bill Gates.

"We do everything on a long term basis and the investments we are making in the region are not changed by the turmoil and economic crisis," he told a press conference after meeting Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"There are many countries here, some of which we are well ahead of our forecast," said Gates, who is on a one-day visit here as part of a regional trip covering Malaysia, Australia, Singapore and the Philippines.

In Sydney on Monday, Gates, who is the co-founder of Microsoft, told a news conference that the company's earnings outlook was unchanged despite the slowdown in Asia.

He said the personal computers software leader had seen its sales figure "certainly been above analysts' expectations every quarter."

Although Microsoft's sales are lower in some countries and higher in others, when the regional sales are lumped together, "we come up ahead because our products are doing very well," he said.

Gates also expressed Microsoft's commitment in expanding the staff strength of its operation in Malaysian, which is also the company's regional headquarters.

"This is our regional headquarters. We continue to add people," he stressed.

On Microsoft's participation in the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project, Gates, who is the project's international advisory panel member said: "I am a big supporter of the basic concept driving the infrastructure."

In addition, Gates said he is playing a big part in the initiatives to increase the Information Technology (IT) skills in the country.

The MSC, a 750 sq km zone located south of Kuala Lumpur, designated as the hub for development of multimedia products and services, is a good showcase for the electronic government project.

Asked whether Microsoft would apply for MSC status, he said: "The things we are doing now are actually the most impactful things related to the training initiatives called Skills 2000.

"But we will also do some direct things as well that would lead to more official designation."

The Microsoft Skills 2000 project includes a significant contribution in training, software, hardware and an awareness campaign involving the Ministry of Education, National and State libraries and others.

The project's initiatives complement the MSC's flagship application on Smart School.

It involves training teachers to use the latest IT tools in school projects and assignments, and re-activates state and national libraries into centres where students congregate to learn.

On his visit here, Gates said it was meant to identify what are the roles that Microsofts's can play in the MSC and the company is committed in "increasing the amount of things it do in the project."

Gates said he had very productive meetings with the cabinet members, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Anwar.

Issues in the meeting included opportunities for Microsoft in Malaysia, development of the MSC, education and the world market.

Meanwhile, in a statement Microsoft said the company would invest close to RM1 million in developing and nurturing young Malaysian software programming talent. -- BERNAMA

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