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MSC-MAHATHIR

MSC PROGRESSES AHEAD OF TARGET

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 24 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Dato Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) has progressed beyond expectations and ahead of target in terms of investment and development.

There are currently 175 MSC status companies with investments totalling over RM3 billion from 242 applications. Currently 109 companies are in operation.

He said the target has exceeded since the MSC was expected to have 200 companies by the year 2000.

Chairing a meeting of the National Information Technology Council (NITC) here, he said the council had today discussed the future of the country in the information technology era.

Dr Mahathir also said that NITC had presented its first term report today apart from studying the formation of five committees on e-community, e-public services, e-learning, e-economy and e-sovereignty.

At the same time, he named the new council line-up for 1998-2001 comprising 25 members from the various sectors of the country.

The Prime Minister as well as Tengku Datuk Dr Mohd Azzman Shariffadeen, president of MIMOS Bhd, will remain as chairman and secretary of the NITC respectively.

Other council members are Chief Secretary to the government Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali, group editor of New Straits Time Press Datuk Abdul Kadir Jasin, president of NeuroNet (M) Sdn Bhd Al-Ishsal Ishak, chairman of Putrajaya Corporation Tan Sri Aziz Zainul Abidin.

Others include chief executive officer (CEO) of Hitechniaga Sdn Bhd Cheong Yuk Wai, CEO Kompleks Metrowangsa Sdn Bhd Dr Ghazali Atan, president of Federation of Malaysian Consumers Association (FOMCA) Prof Hamdan Adnan, chairman of National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health Datuk Lee Lam Thye.

Also involved are Minister of Energy, Telecommunications & Posts Datuk Leo Moggie, director Third World Network Martin Khor, CEO of Shell Malaysia Ltd Datuk Megat Zaharuddin Mohd Noor, chairman Securities Commission Datuk Dr Mohd Munir Abdul Majid, Minister of Education Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Razak.

Also in the line-up are vice-chancellor Universiti Malaysia Sarawak Prof Datuk Dr Mohd Zawawi Ismail, Minister of Finance 11 Datuk Mustapha Mohamed, executive chairman of Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Tan Sri Dr Noordin Mohd Sopiee.

Others include science adviser to the government, Tan Sri Dr Omar Abdul Rahman, executive chairman of Multimedia Development Corporation Tan Sri Othman Yeop Abdullah, Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, chairman of Persatuan Industri Komputer Malaysia (PIKOM) Shaifulbahrim Saleh.

Also in the line-up, dean Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan & Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Prof Dr Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, vice-chairman National Council of Women Organisations Prof Datin Dr Sharifah Hapsah Shahabudin and CEO of Southern Bank Bhd Datuk Tan Teong Hean.

Meanwhile, NITC permanent secretary Tengku Azzman said in the report that the NITC's approach to IT development in Malaysia is based on the hypothesis that this country has some rather special features that will allow its people to come up with new solutions.

He said the government emphasized on telecommunications infrastructure capable of supporting multimedia applications, having issued licences to enable the setting up of digital satellite communications, fibre optic connections, coaxial submarine cables, microwave transmission systems and broadband technology.

Already RM20.3 billion has been invested in building this communications "backbone" with a further investment of RM24.5 billion expected over the next five years to facilitate the mass application of IT nationwide, he added.

However, in Malaysia, Tengku Azzman said the indigenous supply of world class software is virtually non-existent, leading to a lack of confidence in local software products.

While Malaysians do not lack ideas nor the ability to turn ideas into reality, the country does not currently provide a fertile enough environment to grow these ideas.

The lack of seed investment, the relatively small domestic market, unskilled technology management and a distinct preference for foreign products and services, he said, is inhibiting the growth of an indigenous IT industry.

But then, Malaysia's journey to the Information Age will create many opportunities for innovative Malaysian IT products and services for home consumption and export.

Malaysia, Tengku Azzman added, has unique features in terms of its cultural and ethnic diversity, and we can use technologies, knowledge and skills of the Information Age to come up with Asian-relevant solutions. --

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