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MSC project is for the whole world, says PM

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday concurs with critics who have said that the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) is an ambitious project but explained that it is not only for Malaysia but for the whole world.

"We conceived it as a giant testbed for everyone to use, everyone from everywhere," he said in Kuala Lumpur at the two-day Economist Roundtable on Electronic Communities in Asia.

Dr Mahathir said the MSC is a great project not because of Malaysia's vision alone but "everybody's vision who will eventually make the project great".

"It is not for us Malaysians to implement alone. We will participate actively of course but the MSC is for the whole world.

"If I may say so, nowhere is there a project to make full use of information technology (IT) that has benefited from inputs from the best IT brains currently available in the whole world," he added.

Later at a dialogue with participants of the Roundtable, Dr Mahathir acknowledged the intention of several other Asian countries to implement their own massive IT project.

He welcomed the presence of other such centres. "Frankly, every country not only in South-East or Asia but worldwide wants to have some kind of project similar to MSC but most of them, I believe, are on a smaller scale.

"An area like MSC has not been found anywhere, has not been tried or proposed in other parts of the world," he said.

Malaysia, he said, is prepared to share its experience with others as their experience will also be useful to the country.

"Apart from developing the MSC, the policy and strategy is to establish contacts with all other IT centres because we know we cannot be everything to everybody.

"We are going to find other people doing things which we are not doing here and it is useful to have contacts with them to exchange information and interact with them," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on steps taken by the Government to overcome shortage of skilled workers and efforts to retain them from being pinched or hired by foreign companies.

The Prime Minister said it will be very difficult for the Government to retain them because people are going to be more mobile and attracted to whatever is being offered to them.

"Of course, if another country offers them pay that is five times bigger than what we can afford to pay here, they are going to migrate to those countries," he said.

Citing an example, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia is already facing a problem getting lecturers for its local universities.

"It is better for them to work in companies which require their skills than to teach in universities where the stingy Government only pays very little for their skills.

"So, we are already seeing that migration from the Government into the private sector but we will be seeing a lot of movement of people from Malaysia to other countries and vice-versa," he said, adding the Government cannot control the movement of the people.

On the MSC, he said, it is progressing well ahead of schedule, with 110

companies already given the MSC status. Out of these, 78 companies are already in operation at the Corridor, a 15km by 50km zone south of Kuala Lumpur.

Since April last year, the Multimedia Development Corp received 178 applications for the MSC status, out of which 39 per cent are from foreign companies, 35 per cent from local firms, and 26 per cent from joint ventures between local and foreign companies.

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