

22 SEP 1999

Mahathir-Vision

AGRO DEVELOPMENT IS MAHATHIR'S NEXT VISION

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 22 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said developing the country's agricultural sector and turning her into a food producer may be his next vision for Malaysia after the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC).

He said the government was looking at utilising the country's various assets like rivers, lakes, seas and atolls to enrich the country.

Dr Mahathir said as it was, Malaysia was importing too much food items, accounting for a large chunk of the country's import bills that burdened the government especially during the economic downturn.

"My next vision may be more mundane than the previous one but not less useful...we can't be importing too much food," he said during a dialogue with participants at the Multimedia Asia (MMA) 1999 conference and exhibition at the Mines International Exhibition Centre in Seri Kembangan, here.

A participant asked Dr Mahathir about his new vision after the MSC which is a 750 sq km area south of here designated as a hub for the development of multimedia products and services.

When he first heard the question, Dr Mahathir said in jest "I am getting double vision," to the laughter of the participants.

He said the country had tremendous assets that were not fully utilised in terms of agricultural development with people concentrating more on rubber and oil palm plantations.

Dr Mahathir said rearing chicken or planting vegetables could bring more returns than planting rubber or oil palm, adding that Malaysia was not maximising land use.

"Also with so much water around us, maybe we can develop our aquaculture industry," he said.

Citing Chile as an example, he said the South American country, which had no previous experience in salmon rearing, had now become the biggest exporter of the fish.

Dr Mahathir said on his trip to Sabah recently, he noticed many bays which could be suitable for fish rearing.

Turning to MSC, Dr Mahathir said like many other Malaysian endeavours which had proved critics wrong, the MSC would be successful.

He said from an agriculture-based country, Malaysia moved into industrialisation particularly electronics which was one of the nation's biggest foreign exchange contributors.

"Many of our ideas seem to be ridiculous at first but they worked out well in the end. But implementation is also important," he said.

He said the selective capital and currency controls were criticised by many people when introduced a year ago.

"Today we are hearing the nicest comments from the nicest people, from Michel Camdessus," he said in reference to the International Monetary Fund's managing director.

To another question, he said the government kept on pushing for the MSC even during the economic downturn and that effort was bearing fruit as 33 world class companies have now secured MSC status, far beyond the target of 50 companies by 2003.

He said Malaysia was also lucky to corral well known international information technology gurus to become members of its MSC-International Advisory Panel while other countries with similar IT projects were unable to

do so.

Dr Mahathir also said that with inundation of knowledge in the society, the ability to sort out useful information from useless ones quickly could enable one to get ahead of others.

He said the government's scrutiny of various data concerning the country's economic performance in various sectors enabled it to handle the economic woes better.

The prime minister said the country was able to attract investors, thanks to its stability and business-friendly government.

"The business people will ask whether this country is predictable or not. Will PAS win or not in the general election? PAS will not and there will be no sudden twist and turns," he said.

To a question on how the MSC would benefit the disabled, he said as part of the nation's caring society concept, due consideration would be given to all members of the community so that everyone had a fair share of what the country had to offer.

The five-day MMA '99 is jointly-organised by the National Information Technology Council, the Multimedia Development Corporation Sdn Bhd and Mimos Berhad.

The event is aimed at promoting the MSC as Malaysia's "gift to the world" to test-bed ideas and ideals of governance in the new technology age.

The exhibition, occupying 2,800 sq m of exhibition space, showcases 100 of the country's leading companies dealing with multimedia computing, communications and application technologies.

-- BERNAMA

AR RYN