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Mahathir: Help nurture cyberpreneurs

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says Mimos Bhd and the Multimedia Development Corp (MDC) should work together to help nurture a new breed of entrepreneurs, the cyberpreneurs.

He said cyberpreneurs must learn to use technologies like the Internet to generate new businesses, unlike the present practice of relying only on physical supplies.

"It is a totally different way of thinking about business. How to use information to make more money, literally without having anything physically with you," Dr Mahathir said.

Speaking at a press conference after visiting Mimos Bhd at the Technology Park Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, he said a classic example is Amazon.com, a company which sells books worldwide via the Internet.

"Because it has access to a lot of data it is able to supply its clients with books of any kind. I am told even in groceries now, somebody is putting together data on all grocery suppliers so that, without even owning the groceries, they can then supply goods to any point in the world," he said.

Asked what assistance entrepreneurs might need from Mimos, Dr Mahathir said many people still do not understand how to use information technology for business.

"There are so many new areas and Mimos is knowledgeable about that. They can use the Internet for telephony, marketing, teaching, and all kinds of things. It is up to the entrepreneurs to think how they can make use of this extended ability to market things," he said.

On Internet telephony, Dr Mahathir said the Government is still debating whether such activities need to be licensed because the services could be at the expense of existing telephone companies' operations.

"We want to see how we can ensure they (existing telcos) don't lose out because they provide certain facilities too, and they have a right to earn something," he said.

Internet telephony allows a user in Malaysia, for example, to make an international phone call via the Internet and yet pay only the local rate for connecting to the Internet Service Provider.

On problems faced by cyberpreneurs in getting financing, Dr Mahathir said the Government is developing the venture capital industry as part of efforts to address the issue. Several incentives related to this were announced in the Budget 2000.

"Venture capital people must understand that out of 10 projects, they will probably lose money on nine, but the one project that develops can give them sufficient capital gains to make up for all other losses," he said.

Asked if he is satisfied with the progress made by Mimos in its 15-year history, Dr Mahathir said:

"Yes, I think they have made more progress than I had expected. In 1984 we gave Mimos RM5 million (to set it up), now they ask for RM600 million. That is progress, and if we look at their facilities and capabilities, it is a worthwhile investment."

Earlier in his speech, Dr Mahathir used the popular Star Trek TV series and movies as an analogy to describe Mimos' role.

"Think of Mimos as our Starship Enterprise, the flagship of a fleet of

cyber businesses. The flag it carries is nothing less than the national consciousness for the knowledge society and knowledge-based industries. "But more than that, this mother ship will actively encourage the fragile cybercraft. It will share its expertise, thereby giving cyberpreneurs the confidence to go where no businessman or woman has gone. And it will be on standby to help its fleet establish new colonies in cyberspace," he said.

Dr Mahathir's visit coincides with Mimos' third anniversary as a corporate entity.

The Prime Minister also visited Mimos' "Enter the E-World" exhibition, Mimos Semiconductor and Mimos Smart Computing Sdn Bhd.

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