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Mahathir-MSD

NO SLOWDOWN IN APPLICATIONS FOR MSC STATUS, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

CYBERJAYA, March 22 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that there has been no slowdown in applications for Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) status since the government introduced exchange controls last September.

"No, not at all, it is picking up," he told a press conference after a meeting of the National Information Technology Council (NITC) here.

Dr Mahathir said this was "because the businesses today know exactly what the cost of doing business is with the exchange controls in place".

The prime minister was asked whether there was a slowdown in MSC applications.

The selective exchange controls include pegging the ringgit at RM3.80 to the US dollar to shield the ringgit against excessive speculation and bring stability to the currency market.

With the exchange rates fluctuating before the controls were imposed, he said "they had to hedge, they had to do all kinds of things because they really do not know what the cost of doing business is in Malaysia".

Dr Mahathir said the government, in developing the corridor, has targeted 50 world-class companies to be sited in the MSC by the year 2003.

"It is now 1999 and we already have 29 companies," he said.

"So, it is obvious that people are still attracted to the MSC," said Dr Mahathir.

The Prime Minister also said numerous enquiries on MSC-status applications were still coming in.

"So far, the government has approved 205 companies for MSC status out of 270 applications, so the interest is here, there is no problem on our side," he said.

The MSC, a 750 sq km area stretching from the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) to the KL International Airport in Sepang, is a dedicated hub for the development of multimedia products and services.

Asked whether the Hong Kong Cyberport and Singapore One -- information technology hubs being developed by the two countries -- would pose a competition to the MSC, Dr Mahathir said:

"No. What we have here is a very comprehensive plan that involves a whole area complete with a set of new cyber laws, new practices, new facilities designed to cater for all the new developments in information age technology."

"So, there is no other country that can devote (or) certainly Singapore cannot have a 55 km by 15 km area that we have here."

"We allow for free access to the Internet, we allow for people and knowledge workers to come in and out from these countries," he said.

"So ours is a very comprehensive project, it is not just confined to one role or one particular activity," he said.

When asked about the infringement of intellectual property rights in Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said it is undeniable that software piracy is rampant in the country.

As such, the government has decided that the problem should be controlled at the level of buyers of machine who are capable of producing pirated software, he said.

"This is because if we want to go to the shops to seize the copied softwares, this is quite difficult," Dr Mahathir said.

Thus, the government will determine who can buy the machines which can

make CD-ROM, for instance, he said.

He said the government would take appropriate action on those who broke the law in terms of piracy.

"We know that this (piracy problem) is not only causing losses to Microsoft, but our singers are also badly affected," he said.

Even Umno meetings were not spared from piracy, he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is chairman of NITC, announced today the formation of NITC's strategic thrust implementation committee which will be chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The committee was formed in response to the urgent need for a comprehensive national effort to establish a strong information technology mind-set in the country, he said.

Members of the committee include the chairpersons and co-chairpersons of the working groups which are looking at five thrust areas, namely e-economy, e-public services, e-community, e-learning and e-sovereignty and security.

The e-economy working group's chairperson is Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz.

The role of the working group is to facilitate and encourage e-commerce and e-business activities which support the development of a knowledge economy.

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