

10 JUNE 2000

Mahathir-IT

JAPANESE IT COMPANIES SHOULD USE MSC AS TEST BED

By: Mohamed Ghazemy Mahmud

TOKYO, June 10 (Bernama) -- Japanese companies involved in information technology should participate in the development of Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said: "We encourage all Japanese companies involved in information technology to come to Malaysia and use the MSC as a test bed."

They can invest, research and even operate from there because it is possible to operate internationally from the MSC, he told reporters at a news conference after visiting car maker Toyota Higashi Research and Development Centre, near here.

On the increasing number of similar or hybrid multimedia centres throughout the world, Dr Mahathir said: "Hybrids are hybrids but as you know, nobody has such an area that we have."

"50km by 15km, almost a different country with different laws, different practices and different policies with all the infrastructure needed for IT," he said.

"I think other people may have one street and one building but none so far has been able to set up a corridor of the size of the MSC. So we still have the advantage," he added.

On yesterday's discussion with Masayoshi Son, founder and CEO of SOFTBANK, Dr Mahathir said: "He has given an undertaking that he will do something in the MSC. We welcome this."

Son has been aggressive in identifying and investing in embryonic Internet companies during the initial growth of the Internet, making SOFTBANK the veritable father of the Internet revolution.

Softbank owns a wide variety of Internet companies and has leading ownership positions in Internet's blue chip companies including Yahoo!, E TRADE, E LOAN, InsWeb, BUY.com and many others.

On the effects of the problem of brain drain on the development of the MSC, Dr Mahathir said: "It is not a major problem. Of course we are faced with these high salaries that are paid in Europe and America."

"As a result, the people we send to study overseas tend to work there but relative to other countries, Malaysians tend to come back," he said.

On the Asean leaders' meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori yesterday, he said Mori gave an assurance that he would continue the policies carried out by the late prime minister, Keizo Obuchi.

He said: "Obuchi had been helpful towards Asean and Malaysia and we are assured that Mori would continue with the policy that is very friendly towards Asean."

On the need to give developing countries a voice at the G-8 meetings of rich developed nations, Dr Mahathir said: "This is something that was raised in the G-77 meeting in Havana, that before the G-7 decides on anything that can affect the economies of developing countries, they should at least give us a chance to give our views."

"We don't intend to sit at the same table, just to give a briefing," Dr Mahathir said.

He said Mori gave the Asean leaders the assurance that he would carry the message from Asia at the upcoming meeting in Okinawa, Japan, next month.

Dr Mahathir also said that he did not believe in an "Asian Century" because he believed in the "Century of the World."

"We should all be sharing things throughout the world rather than setting up blocs such as Nafta, European Union and other groupings. There is enough wealth in this world for everybody. There is no need for anybody to take everything for himself," he said.

On the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC), he said: "There are signs now that it is being accepted. It may not be called the EAEC, you can call it Asean-Plus."

"The fact is that Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia are now coming together, not against anybody but for the good of the whole world," he said.

Commenting on the International Monetary Fund's softening stance on the proposed Asian Monetary Fund (IMF), Dr Mahathir said: "That is something that we welcome although there are some conditions attached to it."

"Conditions which imply that we must not do anything that will undermine the IMF...not that we intend to, but I don't think people should put down conditions like that.

"We are wise enough to do things that will not do damage to other people," he added.

Commenting on reports of stocks on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE) being affected by rumours of a rift between him and Tun Daim Zainuddin, Dr Mahathir said the stock market thrived on rumours, "if there are no rumours, they (the rumour-mongers) will start one."

For example, he said, they had been telling the world that he and Tun would go separate ways for the past 15 years "and the fact that we still work together doesn't seem to convince people that he (Tun Daim) is not about to leave the government or anything like that."

"Lots of people seem to know what Tun Daim and myself are thinking, so much so that we don't know. We have to ask people what we are thinking," he added.

Dr Mahathir arrived in Japan Wednesday for a week-long working visit and to attend the funeral of Prime Minister Obuchi who died last month.

During his visit to the Toyota R and D centre, Dr Mahathir drove some of the company's latest models at the centre's high-speed track including the Prius, a hybrid car powered by both gasoline and batteries.

-- BERNAMA

GM JK