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`More knowledge workers needed'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Multimedia Super Corridor had accelerated the growth of institutes to produce knowledge workers.

He said that more than 100,000 such workers would be needed in the next five years.

The Prime Minister said that the more than 600 public and private universities and colleges would help meet this demand by producing the required manpowers.

"By the year 2005, the supply will reach 109,000 with a strong percentage in engineering and information technology," Dr Mahathir said at the MSC Information Technology and Telecommunications Awards Night at the Palace of the Golden Horses in Seri Kembangan.

He said that the MSC was expected to create more than 35,000 jobs for knowledge workers in the next five years and attract at least 50 world-class companies by 2003 to set up value-added activities.

Current progress, he said, indicated that the targets were achievable. To date, 306 companies have been awarded MSC status, including more than 147 wholly Malaysian-owned companies.

While reaffirming the Government's commitment in supporting the growth of the MSC, Dr Mahathir said various measures would be undertaken to spawn local companies into global players.

He also said that Malaysia was aiming, through the unique environment provided by the MSC, to promote the development of next-generation multimedia technologies by forging collaborative research and development efforts among leading-edge corporations, public research institutions and universities.

"To be competitive, companies need to invest heavily in R&D and continuously improve their products and services."

Local companies in the MSC won praises from Dr Mahathir for having responded to the Government's call to invest in information technology and multimedia.

He said they had displayed creative capabilities and resourceful innovation in developing products and services in a variety of categories, ranging from software and content development to 3-D animation.

The success of these companies and individuals demonstrated the key importance of creativity and innovation in driving economic growth in the Information Age.

Dr Mahathir said creativity was about seeing things from a different angle and breaking away from old rules and norms that bind people to the traditional way of doing things.

"It allows us to be different and helps us find new answers and solutions to problems, both old and new.

"From creativity comes innovation, and it is from this realisation that the Government has embarked on the creation of the MSC, which is an environment designed to enable creativity and innovation to flourish," he said.

He reminded the participants on how important it was that elements of creativity and innovation fostered by heavy R&D investments be further supported by venture capital funds.

This was necessary to enable the commercialisation of products and services of high quality and high value-added.

"In this regard, Malaysian companies and entrepreneurs should face up to the challenge of thinking out of the box, so that traditional limits to growth can be overcome via more creative and innovative thinking as well as supportive funding arrangements," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that the country was moving in the right direction to be contributors instead of merely consumers of technologies.

"Their achievements are testimony to the fact that on a level playing field offered by the Information Technology and multimedia industries, Malaysian companies and individuals can pull away from the pack even though we are relative latecomers in the field."

Dr Mahathir expressed hope that the initiatives taken would eventually lead to the creation of a new generation of hi-tech start-ups and the establishment of many more local companies that would join the ranks of world-class companies.

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