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Govt forging ahead with e-Village project

Dzulkarnain Taib

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Entertainment Village (e-Village) project in the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) has not been abandoned and that the Government is looking at the possibility of a new partner helming it.

"We are trying to find another partner. We found that the initial capital and investment capacity were inadequate.

"We have not abandoned it. We are still forging ahead with it. We just have to clear up a few things first before another partner takes over," Dr Mahathir told reporters at the end of the first day of the 5th MSC International Advisory Panel Meeting (MSC IAP) at Cyberjaya.

The e-Village project was launched nearly two years ago to cater to creative multimedia innovations and research and development activities. It was also aimed at catalysing the creative entertainment industry by focusing on the creative supply chain.

The e-Village is located on a 486ha site in Dengkil and is about five minutes away by road from Cyberjaya. It has initially secured Entertainment Village Sdn Bhd as the first tenant who is also the developer of the Studio Precinct.

On the MSC IAP meeting, Dr Mahathir said the delegates discussed distance learning as a new project to be taken on at the MSC.

"We want to change the way we teach our children in the classroom by using new materials and new software.

"For example, in the teaching of the English language, not only will the students learn English but simultaneously, the teachers themselves will be able to upgrade their English and teaching skills.

"In addition, the software that is being developed will not only enable children to learn English but also Mathematics and Science.

Asked on the implementation of the distance learning project, Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad said his ministry is conducting a feasibility study on the matter.

"The software is being developed by local experts. We hope to implement it as soon as possible since this is a national initiative," Musa said.

Commenting on the progress of the MSC since it was launched in 1996, Dr Mahathir said to date the number of companies awarded MSC status has exceeded the target.

"We have gone beyond our target.

"We targeted 500 MSC status companies by 2003 but today, we have already attracted 554, of which 46 are world-class companies.

"So investments are coming in. There are already some multinational companies (MNCs) that have made the MSC as their centre or regional hub for their operations worldwide.

He added that one of the MNCs is oil major Shell which has chosen the MSC as its regional hub besides The Hague and Houston in Texas, US.

On foreign direct investments in the MSC project, Dr Mahathir said, "We are not much affected by the US and Japan economic slowdown.

"That's why we still see a lot of investors coming and, the number of companies interested in MSC is increasing judging from the demand for office space and accommodation," he added.

He said the import of intermediate goods has also picked up, pointing to the strengthening of the economy.

"We are told that order books are filling up again.

"So there will be a gradual start to produce goods for export to the US and this has given us some optimism of some form of recovery in the US," Dr Mahathir added.

The 5th MSC IAP meeting also updated the delegates on the MSC's progress.

Presentations by four MSC-status companies were held, in addition to discussions on the global business environment, technological trends and opportunities.

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