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Dr M: MSC has developed well with ideas from IAP

CYBERJAYA, Fri. - The Multimedia Super Corridor has developed well, with Malaysia benefiting from ideas and input of its International Advisory Panel, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the country was not short of talents in information technology as evident from their capacity to produce new IT applications such as 3D and inroads made in bio-technology research.

Speaking at a Press conference on the second day of the three-day IAP meeting at Cyberview Lodge here, Dr Mahathir, who is IAP chairman, said one local company was now doing stem cell and had found an application of stem cell for the purpose for HIV and Thalassaemia treatments.

He said the company was not going to clone human beings, which drew laughter from IAP members and representatives.

Malaysia, he said, was actually looking at the possibility of producing organs for transplant.

"Things like these are actually very exciting," said Dr Mahathir, adding that Malaysia was now not far behind advanced countries in biotechnology research.

Dr Mahathir said the MSC had made much progress over the last one year as seen from the increasing number of buildings and companies operating from Cyberjaya, its intelligent city.

The MSC is a 750 sq km area running south from the Kuala Lumpur City Centre to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport which has been designated as a hub for the development of multimedia products and services.

There are 745 MSC-status companies, including 53 of world-class standard.

The Prime Minister was asked about the Government's stand on open source system, one of the topics discussed at the three-day meeting.

He said: "The Government's position is to try any alternative system, we are not guided by proprietary interests but for the country's benefit and for lower cost."

Asked to comment on one the setbacks of the MSC, the stalled Entertainment Village or E-Village project, Dr Mahathir said the company awarded the job encountered financial difficulties midway through the project.

The Government, he said, was negotiating with another investor to take over, expressing confidence the problems would be resolved.

To a suggestion that contracts be set aside for small MSC-status companies as one way of helping them progress, he said they were free to make a bid.

However, he reminded that securing the projects depended on their ability to undertake them.

"Smaller companies are not in any way excluded (from getting contracts). It does not depend on who you know because you may know the wrong people."

The question on who would be appointed to replace Tan Sri Dr Othman Yeop Abdullah, who stepped down as Multimedia Development Corporation executive chairman and chief executive for health reasons, was also posed.

In reply, the Prime Minister said he was keeping an open mind whether to appoint a bureaucrat or someone from the industry.

In jest, he said someone from the media could also be appointed to head the body responsible for the development of the MSC.

To a question on whether he would stay on as IAP chairman in October

next year when he is expected to step down as the Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir replied: "I don't think I can stay on as chairman, but if I am allowed to, I would like to sit in the discussion and give my views."

Members of the panel shared Dr Mahathir's conviction of the MSC, with Cutler & Company managing director Dr Terry Cutler saying that IAP had actually progressed from an advisory role into one of collaboration.

Motorola executive vice-president and chief technology officer Dennis Robertson said the transformation of the MSC from an oil palm estate into what it was today was "unbelievable".

He said one striking feature of the project was its ability to blend technologies with the human aspects.

Cyber Century Forum senior adviser Ambassador Diana Lady Dougan, admitting to her earlier scepticism of the MSC, said Malaysia and Dr Mahathir had proven that the project was not merely a dream.