

07/09/2003

IAP members propose setting up university dedicated to IT

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CYBERJAYA, Sat. - Describing his one-on-one meeting with Multimedia Super Corridor's International Advisory Panel members as very useful, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today among the latest proposals by the members is the setting up of a university dedicated to information technology.

The Prime Minister said members felt that the university should provide leadership training with direct co-operation with international IT companies which fully supported the MSC.

"These one-on-one meetings are very important and useful because we are presented with numerous ideas and proposals for the future development of the MSC.

"Some members I met today proposed that we set up a university dedicated to certain sectors of information technology, leadership training and the possibility of direct co-operation with certain IT companies," Dr Mahathir said at the conclusion of his two-day one-on-one meeting with the IT magnates of the world.

Speaking at a Press conference at the Cyberview Lodge here, where the meetings were held, Dr Mahathir said the proposals would be given due consideration as such human resource development initiatives were in tandem with MSC's progress into its Second Phase.

Dr Mahathir, who launched MSC's Second Phase development blueprint, dubbed the Metamorphosis, at a colourful ceremony attended by IAP members last night, had said the development of specific IT knowledge was vital for the future of the MSC.

The Second Phase, from 2003 to 2010, will see it link up with other global cybercities and expand its role in setting global standards in technology applications and cyberlaws.

The IAP members, who have been the main source of ideas and support for the MSC, have among others, urged Malaysia to beef up the development of home-grown software and knowledge workers to complement and directly benefit from the project.

Among those who met the Prime Minister today for closed-door consultations were Silicon Graphics Inc chairman and chief executive officer Bob Bishop, Cutler & Company managing director Dr Terry Cutler, Microsoft's chief technical officer Craig Mundie and Dr John Gage who is Sun Microsystems' chief researcher and Science director.

At the Press conference, Dr Mahathir was also asked for his comments pertaining to the Education Ministry's announcement that students' achievement in Science and Mathematics at school level examinations had gone up since English was introduced in the teaching of the two subjects early this year.

Asked if he felt vindicated since there were strong objections from certain groups when the Government announced the move, the Prime Minister said that he was not surprised at all with the positive outcome.

"I think it is natural because when you have to keep on translating, thinking in two languages, then you find your capacity to absorb knowledge is much less. But when you are doing it in a single language and because Science and Mathematics are not Malay subjects, the research is not in Malay ...you absorb better (studying the subjects in English).

"For instance, in English we say potassium, somebody said in Malay it should be kalium...so I think such things cause confusion. What we want to do is to absorb knowledge, but if in between you have to keep on

translating information then the process becomes slow. So, I'm not surprised at all that the students are getting better," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would continue to pursue the teaching of Science and Mathematics in English at the school level as it was vital for Malaysians, especially the young, to master the knowledge which comes through the language.

"We want everybody to have some knowledge of Science and Mathematics because even if you want to be an artist for example, there will come a time when they have to know something about how to use a computer and the basis of computation, so a knowledge of Science and Mathematics is very important for a community that wants to make progress."

He said the matter was also pertinent in the context of the MSC and its requirement for knowledge workers, because to excel further in IT one needs to be well versed in Science and Mathematics, particularly in the utilisation of the binary language.

The Prime Minister was also asked to comment on the just concluded 2003/2004 campus elections at the 17 public universities in the country where the pro-government factions secured victory in 15 universities, except at Universiti Malaya and the International Islamic University.

Defining the "pro-government" factions as responsible students who are serious about their studies and did not wish outsiders to disrupt their learning process, Dr Mahathir said such students must set examples by excelling in their quest for knowledge.

"I'm happy that the majority of university students have clearly expressed their stand that they do not want to be pulled into the politics of hatred which is spread among them by a certain political party.

"The Government's view is that students should confine themselves to the internal politics of the university (campus election). Don't get overzealous and neglect your studies by taking part in detrimental politics of hatred which would not only ruin your future but also waste government funds," he advised.

Dr Mahathir said it was not fair for students to be anti-government and indulge in all sorts of negative acts such as slander, cheating and telling lies in their zest to be involved in politics as the Government had done nothing wrong towards them.

He said in fact, the huge chunk of the national budget was allocated for education and funding for universities was one of the main expenditures of the allocation.

"What wrong has the Government done against students in universities? We give them scholarships, we build new universities with world class facilities, we provide all kinds of assistance, we give cash aid for poor students. There is no reason for university students to be anti-government because their duty is to study and not to waste the taxpayers money by indulging in party politics.

"My advice is, don't be overzealous in party politics, just take part in campus politics and choose someone whom you think is good," he said, adding that they could get into active politics once they have completed their studies and could sustain themselves financially.

Asked if the overwhelming victory scored by the "responsible students" was a clear indication that the silent majority was solidly behind the Government, Dr Mahathir said every student would stand behind the Government, if not for the politics of hatred which was spread at campuses to poison the young minds.