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Towards high-quality talent (HL)

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CYBERJAYA, Fri. - The Prime Minister today said rules and regulations governing universities and the use of government funds for research and development will be relaxed to facilitate greater university-industry co-operation in information communications technology and give researchers more freedom to work independently.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Phase Two of the Multimedia Super Corridor's development would focus on the creation of high-quality Malaysian talent and leaders in ICT and in this regard, there must be closer collaboration between the industry and local universities.

"If researchers are given the freedom to work independently, results (of research) will be more relevant and applicable in business.

"We need to adjust our thinking and, if necessary, relax a little bit our rules and regulations governing the universities as well as the use of government funds for R&D.

"Universities tend to be more academic in research and sometimes this means the results of R&D are not applied," he said at a Press conference on the second day of the seventh MSC IAP meeting at the Cyberview Lodge.

Phase Two of the MSC's development (2003-2010) was launched today and it aims to create a web of corridors, 250 world-class companies, set global standards in flagship applications, harmonise a global framework of cyberlaws and four to five intelligent cities linked to other global cybercities.

The MSC is a 750 sq km area from the Kuala Lumpur City Centre running south to the KL International Airport in Sepang. It is Malaysia's version of the United States' Silicon Valley.

Dr Mahathir said the creation of high-quality talent was important because the Government wanted the MSC to be able to provide "thought leadership", which meant leadership in thinking and innovation so that the application of computer technology in various fields would be "different from the others".

On the MSC's success, Dr Mahathir acknowledged it had been beyond expectations, especially in terms of numbers.

"The number of companies targeted was 500 this year, but so far there are already 930 companies. We targeted 30 world-class companies by this year, but we already have well over 50. If you look around, previously there were only palm trees but now we have beautiful buildings and they are not empty. That is what we targeted for and we are satisfied with that."

He said the number of job opportunities created last year was 17,000 and this year, 21,000.

"That's a big number and we expect it to grow further. The total sales projected this year is RM5.85 billion compared to RM4 billion last year.

"Employment has gone up and these are not ordinary workers but knowledge workers and they are highly paid. So, we are creating jobs for people who are better trained."

Saying that Malaysia's plan was for its people to work in jobs which were highly skilled and attracted better pay, Dr Mahathir added that the MSC had previously concentrated only on creating jobs for employment but now, the Government wanted Malaysians to have higher wages.

"For that, Malaysians must be better qualified and able to contribute more." He said under Phase Two, the focus would be on increasing the

income of the people by having them participate in jobs that required more skills and knowledge.

"We can increase wages by going on strike for higher pay but that will not last very long. By training our people and creating opportunities for them to work in higher-paying jobs, the MSC will contribute towards the country's vision of becoming a developed country.

"We can do with a lot more jobs because we have the manpower. Immigrant workers will be doing most of the low-paying jobs but for the high-paying jobs, we would like to see Malaysians fill them. But they have to accept being trained and disciplined." He said Malaysian workers had the capacity to under-take highly-skilled jobs.

"They can do all kinds of things like swim across the English Channel and do sophisticated jobs. Malaysia Boleh. Malaysia Can."

On whether Malaysia would document the MSC successes for the reference of countries interested in establishing a similar setup, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was an "open book" and was willing to share its experiences.

"Every single word uttered in IAP meetings is recorded. We have full recordings of everything and have an archive from 1996 until today documented in a systematic way.

"As you know, lots of people are interested in setting up their own MSC in their own country. We will show them what we have done."

On whether more incentives would be introduced under Phase Two, he said the Government was considering according similar privileges currently given to companies operating within the MSC to those established in new centres set up in other States.

"Some companies have already been set up in these new centres but are not given the same privileges as those which locate their business within the MSC."

Asked whether he would play an advisory role in the MSC after he retires next month, Dr Mahathir said, to applause from the floor: "You need to ask the man who will be Prime Minister. But as far as I am concerned, if there is anything I can do to help, I would like to contribute."

Dr Mahathir thanked IAP members for their time and participation in the meeting this year.

"Your participation has been fruitful or else the MSC would not have achieved what it has achieved."

He said attendance this year has been bigger than usual with six IAP members presenting papers, and discussions had covered a whole spectrum of the MSC.

"The MSC has done well but things are changing rapidly and we have to keep up with them."

"The MSC, as a global ICT hub, needs to develop a habitat for entrepreneurship and innovation as unlike traditional economies, financial capital and skilled workers tend to be more mobile."

After the Press conference, the Prime Minister engaged IAP members in one-on-one sessions, which will go on until tomorrow.