

EXCERPTS FROM THE SPEECHES OF

MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

ON THE

Multimedia Super Corridor



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PELANDUK PUBLICATIONS

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Preface

Reinventing Our Common Future

THE Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) concept has spread across the international community like wildfire. I think there is not a single country which does not know about the MSC. I hear people talking about the MSC all the time, wherever I go, even in Mongolia. They asked me about the MSC and how they can learn from it. The MSC is a giant test-bed for experimenting with not only multimedia technology, but also, and more importantly, the evolution of a new way of life in the unfolding age of information and knowledge. The MSC is, therefore, "Malaysia's gift to the world", a creation that welcomes the involvement of the global community in sharing the useful lessons of multimedia development.

Since its launch in 1996, there have been raised eyebrows as to whether Malaysia can pull it off. On the other hand, there has also been much support for the MSC. Both the international community and Malaysia alike, I believe, understand better the concept of the

MSC now. I am sure as more programmes under the MSC roll out, greater understanding and clarity will ensue.

Several groundbreaking events have taken place since the launch of the MSC. In January 1997, we had the first meeting of the MSC International Advisory Panel (IAP), a panel made up of CEOs from leading IT companies around the world. In May, the foundation stone for Cyberjaya, MSC's dedicated intelligent city for multimedia companies, was laid. Furthermore, the other anchor projects in the MSC, Putrajaya—the smart new administrative capital—and the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) are progressing well. Four cyberlaws were also tabled and passed in the Malaysian Parliament in May. In July, the Multimedia Development Corporation (MDC) issued the Concept Requests for Proposals (CRFPs) for bids by private companies to spearhead four of the seven flagship applications—electronic government, smart schools, telemedicine and the multi-purpose card.

We have a clear vision for Malaysia called Vision 2020, the purpose of which is to attain developed-nation status by the year 2020. We want to become a developed nation in our own mould. Malaysia's IT Agenda defines the content of the mould as the creation of a Civil Society. By "Civil Society" we mean a community which is self-regulating and empowered through the use of knowledge, skills and values inculcated within the people. Such a society will allow every Malaysian to live a life of dignity, not just in the here and now, but also in the future. The million-dollar question is, of course, how we can achieve it.

The manufacturing sector has become the mainstay for Malaysia's sustained economic growth of between 7 and 8 per cent over the last two decades. According to our calculations, to achieve our target of a developed nation, the growth rate must continue to average at least 7 per cent per year until the year 2020. However, we anticipate that the manufacturing sector's contribution to GDP will peak at around 38 per cent by the year 2005. It is obvious to us that we need a second engine of growth if we are to achieve Vision 2020. This sec-

ond engine has to be jump-started by the year 2005. The question now is, can we do it?

We have read the charts and studied the trends. We have tried to put our finger on the pulse of the forces that will shape the socio-economic tapestry of the future. One consistent pounding beat was digital technology. Thus, we decided to make the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) the engine of growth within all economic sectors. To obtain a clearer focus on this new and powerful agent of change, we formed the National Information Technology Council (NITC) in 1995.

The basic role of the NITC is to advise the government on ICT policies and strategies and to help operationalise them. Since we are literally moving into the unknown and we expect rapid and radical changes, it is prudent that we test our ideas first before implementing them nationwide to avoid costly mistakes. Hence, the MSC as a test-bed. We hope the MSC will make the first ripple which will turn into a tidal wave and engulf the whole country, transforming it into a global multimedia hub in its wake. The National IT Agenda provides the broad policy framework for propelling this transformation towards the creation of a Civil Society. The Agenda outlines a three-pronged strategy to achieve a knowledge-based society through people, infrastructure and application development. Needless to say, digital technology will provide the underlying creative force.

You may have noticed that I used the word "creation" with reference to Vision 2020. This was deliberate. "Evolution" or "development" would imply maintaining the *status quo*—of more continuity. The digital wind is the harbinger of discontinuities. Breaks will take place—and breaks will have to be made—in the way we think, work and live. To our minds, the break from the past will be the most crucial—and the yawning gulf to the future must be bridged; the MSC is our tentative first bridge. It is within this context that the MSC must be viewed. We see the MSC as the seed that will sprout the Civil Society. The MSC is our first investment for the future. In fact, the MSC is our experimental tool for inventing our common future.

Inventing the future does not mean forecasting the future—no ordinary mortal can do that. It means setting in motion certain agents of change now, taking into account current realities and future uncertainties, in the hope that what we envision may be attained. This implies reinvention—reinvention in virtually every field of major significance. This is precisely what we are attempting to do with the MSC. For example, through the electronic government flagship, we hope to reinvent governance; through the smart school flagship, we hope to reinvent education; through the telemedicine flagship, we hope to reinvent healthcare; and through the borderless marketing flagship, we hope to reinvent business practices.

I see governance as the “umbrella” concept embracing and defining this process of reinvention and therefore is the most important. Reinventing governance is not something that we have just thought about. In fact, we have been doing it for quite some time. As a first step, we started to restructure the government machinery—by trimming and slimming it down to make it more efficient and effective. The idea is to hold only strategic public portfolios within the government machinery such as defence, justice and finance, and to privatise much of the rest. In this respect, public good service functions such as telecommunications, power and railway transportation, traditionally under the aegis of the government, have now been privatised. This process is tied closely with another idea we experimented with—the Malaysia Incorporated concept—where the government and the private sector work closely together to develop the nation. And I must say we have been quite successful in implementing both these concepts.

The idea of an electronic government is the second stage in our ongoing quest for right-sizing governance. Electronic governance is not merely governing through electronic means. Technology is just a means to an end—the end being revamped structures, systems and procedures to implement change and striving for excellence above and beyond previously attained levels. Therefore, the move from Kuala Lumpur to Putrajaya is more than a physical migration. It is also symbolic of discarding old legacies and old mindsets—a move towards information-driven frameworks for performance-based

management and services. And, we hope, this move will set in motion a paradigm shift in our way of thinking, working and living.

We in Malaysia, of course, are fully aware and realistic that inventing the future, and by implication reinventing existing realities, is not as easy as it sounds. The journey is going to be difficult—dotted with pitfalls and challenges all the way. We are also aware that we cannot do it all by ourselves. We admit that we do not possess the required technologies nor the knowledge to do what we want to do. But our spirit is willing; our bodies are strong; our economic fundamentals are right; and, we are willing to work with others and to learn—and to learn fast. Learning by doing—that is how we did it in the past and that is how we intend to journey forward. Through the Malaysia Incorporated concept, we successfully changed from an agricultural-based economy to an industrial one within two decades. Concerns for distributive equity were not ignored either. We now have time-tested techniques and we are confident they will stand us in good stead for a repeat performance.

The MSC, therefore, will take the concept of Malaysia Incorporated a step further—towards global smart partnerships. We would like to invite the world community to join us to shape a common future together. We invite collaboration instead of confrontation, enrichment instead of exploitation, sharing instead of grabbing. These should remain the catchwords; these should provide the basis towards evolving a just and equitable global society.

The United States' recent "Framework for Global Electronic Commerce" initiative advocates non-regulated private-sector leadership. The market rewards the efficient and punishes the inefficient and the less able. Efficiency and equity do not go hand in hand. Therefore, leaving the digital economy to a self-regulating market will only widen the gap between the info-rich and info-poor. The *laissez-faire* market is myopic, interested only in the bottom-line—with no concern for social justice. Can a free market really replace responsible governance? Laws and regulations are irksome. We should reduce their roles, but anarchy certainly cannot be better for the marketplace.

age our destinies instead of leaving it entirely to the free-market system? We are not retreating from the borderless world and unfettered trade. It is simply that human society needs order and a degree of certainty for it to function at all. Occasional chaos may be managed, but endemic chaos must affect society and life negatively. The disappearance of borders between nations simply means that a bigger entity or a new world-encompassing nation will emerge. Knowledge by itself is not going to make this huge single human tribe live in peace. Certainly, unregulated free trade even if backed by massive information will not result in wealth and happiness for everyone.

We can all plunge into the information age with our eyes closed. But why should we when there is the possibility of testing and finding out how things will work or turn out. Malaysia's MSC is an attempt at creating an environment for testing not just the technology but the way of life itself. The opportunities for experimenting are unlimited. We need only to think up possible scenarios in order to experiment and test. We will not get all the answers, but we should not be groping in total darkness as we enter the next millennium and the Information Age.

This book is based on the speeches I made and press interviews I gave on the MSC. They have been reorganised and given a new lease of life to provide an overview of the MSC. I would like to thank my publisher, Mr Ng Tieh Chuan, Dr Norsaidatul Akmar Mazelan of the Multimedia Development Corporation (MDC), Puan Aini Aman of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and Cik Puan binti Yatim of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, for organising this book, and last but not least, Tan Sri Dr Othman Yeop Abdullah, the Chairman of MDC, for his cooperation.

Dr Mahathir Mohamad
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