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Big scope for expanding the MSC applications

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THE excitement about the Multimedia Super Corridor has been steadily mounting, especially in the private sector, as there is a huge amount of profit to be made.

Even Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad acknowledged this potential just eight days ago: "Studies have shown that with the MSC, we have the potential to increase our per capita Gross Domestic Product by three, or even four times by 2020."

According to a study conducted by Sumitomo Corporation, the value that will be generated by the multimedia industry in the MSC to the national economy after the first five years is estimated at RM25 billion, he said.

But to ensure this projection becomes a reality, many more steps still need to be taken. For, after all, the MSC project is still very much at the conceptual stage.

As such, it is only natural that the studies undertaken by the Government with the private sector now proceed to the next stage: the Concept Request for Proposal. While this process may seem to be unduly longer than it should be, one must also understand the basis of why this has to be so.

The earlier discussions between Government officials and numerous private firms over the past one year was to help the public sector better understand the capabilities offered by the MSC project.

After all, the Internet is also such a new technology for many in positions to make decisions and it takes time for them to understand the implications of technology and trends as they evolve.

Now that the underlying technologies have been better understood, the next stage is that for gleaning ideas of what future trends and technologies will be.

This is the CRFP stage, wherein the Government seeks ideas from the private sector on how best it can facilitate the development of the MSC project.

While others may want to see it differently, such a process is actually very laudable as it shows the Government is committed to keeping its consultative stance with the private sector instead of taking on the attitude of a know-it-all.

And so, the CRFPs are now being sought from private Malaysian and foreign companies to propose the most innovative solutions for the 15 pilot projects under the seven MSC flagship projects.

They are electronic Government, multi-purpose card, smart schools, telemedicine, borderless marketing, research and development clusters, and worldwide manufacturing web.

Even so, various other processes still need to be undertaken and the CRFPs should be seen as having the emphasis of defining project objectives and desired benefits rather than specifying detailed technical requirements.

As such, the impact of the Multimedia Super Corridor's seven flagship applications may not be immediately felt or seen by Malaysians but it will improve their standard of living in the near future.

While this is taking place, the private sector need not take it easy until various specifications are set for they can already start developing MSC-related projects on their own.

After all, the most important aspect of the seven flagships have already

been announced. All of them must subscribe to open technology and business models.

Also, it is no big secret that Sun Microsystems' new Java technology is expected to play a big part in the MSC project, given its capability for computer programmes to be written and used independently of any computer used.

The only matter left to be pursued is that of one's imagination, to seek and develop a niche in which one is ahead of others that it becomes a significant competitive advantage.

This column has already presented a few points of how such ideas can be developed and during the past two weeks while this writer was covering the Asean Ministerial Meetings, it is clear that other countries within the region are also looking at our MSC project for possible guidance.

But, it does not take much to come up with profitable ideas. All it takes is to understand existing products and services so as to make them better.

One good example is the installation of lap-top computers in police patrol cars to make it easier for police officers to conduct quick background checks so as to better perform their duties.

Deputy Home Minister Datuk Mohamed Tajol Rosli Ghazali launched this programme early last month to allow police officers to use computers in their cars to access the criminal database at the Federal police headquarters in Bukit Aman.

In many other developed nations, such a facility has already been available for some time now, so equipping police cars with computers may not seem to be such a big deal.

Still, with a bit of imagination, one can see the potential to make this facility into a world-class application if one were to link it up with a MSC flagship project - the multi-purpose card.

Given the existing situation where many summonses are not paid by motorists, an enterprising individual can offer to the police the capability to collect payments on the spot from motorists.

How?

Simply by allowing the police officers to swipe the motorists' ATM cards using an electronic reader such that payment is immediately made, in the same way many Malayan Banking Bhd card users can already use them to pay for groceries.

And since the police computers obviously need to use a separate wireless frequency for their communications to the central database, a cellular phone company can also jump into this venture as well.

Of course, there are still some kinks to be ironed out as no police officer can be expected to wait for someone who has parked illegally to return to his vehicle so as to collect the summons due.

But, that is a small matter that can be resolved with some imagination. After all, profits beckon since the police are investing RM200 million already in the project, with RM20 million in the Klang Valley alone.

Perhaps this will see a lot fewer summonses being unsettled, and lesser shocks at the time of renewing road taxes or driving licences.

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