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Bringing MSC message to US, Japan

A. Kadir Jasin

ANYBODY who thinks that Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month, is a time to relax and take things easy is wrong. Ramadan is neither the time to relax nor to slow down.

On the contrary, fasting itself teaches Muslims to persevere and work harder. According to the Quran, fasting is mandatory for Muslims in order to make them realise the sufferings of others and learn to be generous.

They are encouraged to give generously to the poor. In the closing days of the month, they are required to pay the fitrah comprising a certain amount of food grain or its equivalent in cash to the poor and those who serve the religion.

By the nature of the practice, working hard becomes natural to Muslims during the fasting month. This is because there are no meal breaks to take and Muslims are discouraged from engaging in unproductive activities.

Chit-chat is discouraged as this may lead to incorrect or unpleasant things being said. Fasting is not only an abstention from food and water but also from other demands of the nafsu (desire). In their free time, Muslims are encouraged to read the Quran and perform additional prayers over and above the five times daily.

Hence, working hard is not only a must but wholly feasible during the fasting month. And setting the example is the Prime Minister himself.

This year, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is starting Ramadan by leading a Malaysian IT (information technology) delegation to the United States and Japan for a very hectic working visit. He leaves for the US today and completes the mission on Jan 20 in Tokyo.

Although he goes abroad regularly and several times a year to the US and Japan, this particular visit is unique. The Prime Minister is taking the message of yet another of his brainwave - the Multimedia Super Corridor or MSC - to the who's who of the US' and Japan's IT industry.

During that period, he is scheduled to meet scores of these people, attend IT-related conferences, visit IT facilities and meet members of the Malaysian community at a mosque in Los Angeles.

A young Malaysian Chinese IT nerd (to use the term liberally), who is in the Prime Minister's delegation, said he is equally excited about the mosque visit, which is going to be his first, as he is about meeting the bigwigs of the US and Asian IT industry.

Dr Mahathir will be meeting the likes of Lewis Platt, chairman and chief executive officer of Hewlett-Packard; Jim Clark, chairman of Netscape, Larry Ellison; CEO of Oracle, Bon Moo Koo, CEO and vice-chairman of Korea's LG Group, and Nobuyuki Idei, president and CEO of Sony Corporation.

This unprecedented assembly of American and Asian IT industry CEOs is being made possible as much by Dr Mahathir's magnetism as it is by the MSC. These CEOs plus a score of others, most likely including Microsoft's Bill Gates, are members of the MSC's international advisory panel.

The latest indication shows that most of these IT heavyweights will be attending the inaugural meeting of the panel on Jan 16, which will be chaired by Dr Mahathir.

A private sector member of the Prime Minister's delegation, who is familiar with the IT industry, said this could easily be the single largest assembly of IT's who's who under the patronage of a head of government.

In is understood that some 1,400 people have confirmed their attendance at the Prime Minister's talk at Stanford University. Accompanying Dr Mahathir are 65 top local IT personalities.
(See accompanying report on page 7)