

16/01/1997

Creating cyber history

TO LOOK at the international advisory panel (IAP) of the country's multimedia super corridor (MSC) is to behold at an unthinkable scenario, or at least it used to be unthinkable. To have Microsoft and Netscape founders sitting in the same room and working towards a vision that is not theirs is unheard of, to say the least. And on top of that to have them sit together as well with the chief executives of Apple, IBM, Acer, Compaq, and NTT, just to name a few. Hard core IT nerds know of half the personalities on the IAP list as sworn enemies and formidable foes. Some, faced with such a fantastic prospect of gathering the 28 biggest names in multimedia and IT, may take comfort in such things as virtual reality, but the question everyone wants to ask is, how did the Prime Minister pull it off?

Perhaps, only Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will be able to answer that. To convince Bill Gates, James Barksdale and Louis Gerstner to come together and expand on his idea of the MSC must be one of the biggest coups in cyber history. These names, and most of the others on the IAP list, are not just competitors but foes in an industry that is growing rapidly and has little compassion for the braindead and burned out and anyone else who fails to churn out innovations and new technologies. The explosion of the Internet, the threat of Netscape and the advent of Windows have created many Goliaths who are pitting against one another, and changing the way we live our lives and conduct our businesses.

The MSC itself is prompted by the creation and innovation of those people and companies on the IAP, the growth of multimedia and the potential of using IT to speed up Malaysia's industrialisation. Dr Mahathir's vision of the whole of Malaysia being a multimedia hub is as fantastic as the list of IAP he has secured. With the MSC, Malaysians will be the first on Earth to carry a multipurpose smart card which serves as individual identification data, an electronic signature, and for access to government, banking, credit, telephone, transport and club services. Malaysia will also be the pioneer in electronic Government; all its schools will be smart and linked to the Internet; it will have telemedicine where electronic data exchange will be conducted between local medical facilities and their counterparts from all over the world; and it is even thinking of having a cyber court.

In fact, as Dr Mahathir was telling a group of special-effects wizards from Hollywood, the aim is to turn the whole of Malaysia into a multimedia super corridor by 2020, the year the Government hopes to see the country join the ranks of the developed nations. In the first phase, Malaysians would learn from their international partners operating in the MSC. The second phase will see the linking up of the MSC with "other islands of excellence" within the country. Finally, the entire nation would be transformed into a multimedia super corridor. This is why Dr Mahathir and his deputy, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, will personally oversee the activities of the Multimedia Development Corporation (MDC), which was formed to undertake the tasks of implementing the MSC.

The gathering of IT and multimedia heavyweights due to Malaysia's MSC is big news not just for Malaysia, but also for the US, Canada, Europe, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, the countries represented on the IAP. The meeting today will undoubtedly create cyber history. But as for Malaysians, these are early days yet to get excited. For Malaysians, the

learning curve is about to start; the first phase of the programme that would ultimately turn the country into an MSC nation - the first MSC nation - is only just beginning. Needless to say, a lot of hard work and difficulties and obstacles will be encountered along the way. Many will even experience failures and frustrations in trying to learn as fast as they can and realise yet another ideal that has been set for them to achieve. If every Malaysian were to give his or her best to achieve this ideal, the nation should eventually get closer to this objective.

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