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Indians keen to take part in project

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AS efforts to bring the Multimedia Super Corridor closer to reality are highlighted in the Multimedia Asia '97 exhibition and conference from Tuesday, it is interesting to note how others view our futuristic initiative.

Attracted by the potential offered by the MSC project, a team from Indian multimedia development firm Srishti Interactive Technologies Pvt Ltd made its way here for a one week exploratory visit.

In an interview, Srishti director B. Rabindranath said he came to know of the MSC project during a recent visit by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to India.

Having learnt of the project, he said a meeting was arranged with one of the Malaysian firms which had representatives on the tour and after discussions were held, decided to come see for himself what was being done.

"The MSC project is very interesting to us as Malaysia is a market that is quite similar to us as it is also part of Asia.

"We wanted to see how we could take advantage of the Asian similarities to form partnerships with Malaysians in projects that could benefit both the MSC project and our own home markets in India."

He said he was quite impressed with what he had seen during his visit, especially since one of the main focuses for the MSC project was content development.

"Malaysia is very rich culturally and there is so much about the country you could put into multimedia content for both local consumption and to be offered to the rest of the world.

"Also, you are taking on very interesting projects like the multi-purpose card and the electronic government. Such projects can be easily translated to India and it is a good idea that Malaysia has made the MSC a testbed project where others can learn the experience gathered here.

"Further, you are also formulating cyberlaws which can help set the standards for common multimedia interaction and we in India can learn from some of your efforts."

One of the main aspects of the MSC project which attracted him to visit Malaysia was the high bandwidth communications trunk which will underpin the whole project.

"In India, our telecommunications infrastructure is still very poor and the Internet gateway is still very limited in its capacity.

"Therefore, we can take on projects here which we would otherwise not be able to take on in India."

Another important aspect was the fact that the MSC project offered avenues to explore new business areas which would have been quite limited in India.

"A big part of our operations right now is focused on serving the textile industry which is a big industry in India now, especially around our office in Chennai (Madras)."

He said the company was acknowledged and certified by many household software names like Apple and Microsoft in developing software for the US firms.

"When we want to take on different challenges, we have to look outward and serve the American firms to expand our business.

"India is quite well known among the computer software companies and our

four main computer centres are Chennai, Mumbai (Bombay), Hyderabad and Bangalore."

He said Chennai was the oldest centre for computer software development, but in terms of visibility, Bangalore had overtaken the others due to very good marketing efforts.

"Our parent company, Congruent Software Pvt Ltd, does a lot of software development for the US firms now as we have established a 10-year relationship with them and are privy to some of the new technologies which will be introduced two years from now."

But, he said, such a relationship also had its limitations due to opportunities being confined only to those given to them by the US firms.

To overcome this, he said, some of the shareholders and directors decided to set up Srishti to explore the emerging market potentials for multimedia content.

"We saw a lot of potential, especially since I was directly involved in the advertising and marketing division of the group," said Srishti director V. Chandrasekaran.

He said Srishti had just completed a multimedia kiosk for Indian hotel chain run by the Taj Group featuring tourist attractions and various aspects of the Indian culture and he was looking at expanding this network.

"I see something similar has already been done here, but there is so much more you can do. In fact, if you want to have an interactive virtual reality tour of Malaysian sights, you can easily do that within the MSC project," he said.

Another advantage that Malaysia has in attracting Indian software companies, Chandrasekaran said, was the fact that there were many similarities between the two cultures which could allow the firms to do projects here that could be adapted for other Asian countries.

"India may be a big market in the future, but we must also look at other Asian countries which have moved ahead of us in the economic frontier."

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