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Malaysia: Into the IT era

ALL is set for Malaysia's quantum leap into the Information Technology Age. In a matter of days now, the much-publicised and talked-about Multimedia Super Corridor will take off with the launching of the Multimedia University and Nippon Telephone and Telegraph's research and development centre. The initial step to set up the university to provide graduates to meet MSC companies skill requirements and research is a move in the right direction to ensure the successful implementation and management of this ambitious project.

The MSC, a pilot project for harmonising the entire nation with the global forces shaping the Information Age, is expected to be in its final phase by the year 2020 when Malaysia hopes to be a developed nation. By that time Malaysia should be an information powerhouse, with its people living and working in a smart environment and the country linked to other smart-regions around the world. The response to the MSC since Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's selling mission to the United States and Japan in the New Year has been "overwhelming" with more than 400 enquiries from foreign and local joint venture multimedia companies. This is not surprising as it is eminently clear that Malaysia is going all-out to offer the best facilities. The 15km wide by 50km long corridor that runs from the Kuala Lumpur City Centre to the region's largest airport in Sepang, promises ideal physical infrastructure, laws, policies and practices that will enable companies to explore the Information Age without the usual constraints which frustrate them.

True to the Government's categorical commitment to making the MSC a success, Dr Mahathir has announced that the proposed cyberlaws will be tabled in Parliament next month. Providing the ground rules and transparency for investors and operators, the legislation incorporating the Digital Signature Act, Intellectual Property Act and Computer Crime Act will go a long way to gain their confidence. The comprehensive incentives in the Multimedia Bill of Guarantees and the easing of conditions for the import of manpower with multimedia knowledge will enhance their interests.

As promised, Dr Mahathir went on TV on Wednesday to further explain the MSC. Reiterating that it is imperative that Malaysia makes a head-start lest we be left behind, he said Malaysia will invariably be affected given the borderless world of this rapidly-developing IT age. Hence, it is best that the nation and its people be prepared for this change, be involved and master the technology, reaping at the same time the maximum benefits. To ignore the change will be both counter-productive and self-deluding as it is impossible to stop the cyberwaves in this Information Era. Initial scepticism and fear are understandable each time we venture into something brand new. But these must not be impediments to the nation's effort to offer the MSC as a gift to the world to mutually enrich companies and countries. It is crucial that the people learn to understand the power of this IT tool in their hands so that it can be properly wielded. The crux of the matter is that Malaysians must be positive in receiving this challenge and have faith in their ability to absorb the knowledge for the nation and the people's advancement. Negativism will get us nowhere. This message should be driven home to promote greater understanding of the MSC.

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