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MSC will pave way into Digital Age: Dr M

Hardev Kaur in Fukuoka

FUKUOKA, Fri: The Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) will set the stage for Malaysians to enter the "digital century" as it (MSC) is envisaged to become a "global community living at the leading edge of the Information Society".

In addition, it is hoped that a few of "tomorrow's leaders" with new products and services in the MSC will be from Malaysia.

Addressing participants of the Fukuoka Dialogue, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia plans to be a "global pioneer" in flagship applications identified for the MSC and identify "project champions" for each of the applications.

The seven flagship applications being developed for the MSC are: electronic government, a national multi-purpose smart card, smart schools, a research and development cluster, telemedicine, a worldwide manufacturing web and borderless marketing.

Over time, each of these flagship applications will generate a web of world class and Malaysian companies collaborating to develop and deliver innovative products and services.

Since no company can be the champion of every application, companies can cooperate to find in which application they can be the best in, and work with their respective counterparts, be they Japanese or Malaysian.

They can then develop the identified application into one which can be used as a model for the world, Dr Mahathir said in his address, "The Digital Century: Opportunities for Mutual Collaboration between Japan and Malaysia".

The MSC will be a multi-cultural "web" of mutually-dependent international and Malaysian companies collaborating to deliver new products and services to customers across an economically vibrant Asia and the world. This "web" will eventually extend beyond Malaysia's borders and out across Malaysia's multi-cultural links to its neighbours.

Dr Mahathir explained that this means "When we produce a product, component manufacturing can be done in China, on machines that are programmed from Japan, with software written in India, and financing coming from Labuan International Offshore Financial Centre. The product may be assembled in Penang and shipped to global customers direct from our new airport, Kuala Lumpur International Airport, within the MSC".

The first phase of the MSC should see hundreds of large and small companies working with one another and with partners across the Asia-Pacific and the world. Some of these companies will certainly be today's leaders, according to Dr Mahathir.

For technology companies to be internationally competitive in the growth industries of the 21st century, the Prime Minister said new industrial global standards need to be re-defined and this even as "revolutionary IT products and services are developed".

The Digital Age has created conditions for the first time in history that will enable countries and companies to mutually enrich each other. It is no longer a zero sum game with winners and losers.

Changes taking place have made what was impossible in the old economy of the Industrial Age to be suddenly possible in the Information Age. For a limited time there is a "relatively level playing field where developed and developing countries can work together in ways that create benefits for both".

Many wealthier developed countries are locked into obsolete industrial structures and legislative frameworks. Dr Mahathir said vested interests in these systems will stubbornly oppose any change, adding that fortunately these corporate interests have not had time to develop and become powerful in the developing countries like Malaysia.

While moving ahead with "all the dazzling effects of information technology", Dr Mahathir reminded the audience that "we must never forget that artificial intelligence can never replace the human intellect". People - and specifically managers of corporations - must lead business and society with a social responsibility that displays not only a balanced set of values of humanity and ethics into their organisations but one that will inculcate spirit of corporate identity.

"In the digital century, in which everything is reduced to bits and bytes, one needs to have something solid and real to fall back on." As such, the Prime Minister called upon the corporate leaders of Malaysia and Japan to propagate "our own philosophy of knowledge that is imbued with our own sets of Asian values".

In addition, Asia should adopt a pro-active approach towards counter-balancing the Western dominance of the cyberspace. He hastened to add that "we are not saying that Western influence is all bad but emphasising that by being digital, being IT literate and being technologically advanced does not mean that Asian values are not relevant.

"If anything, they are more relevant," he said, adding that they will be even more relevant "for our men and women as they search for their own niche and identities in a borderless environment".

He said on top of the priority list for mutual cooperation will be recreating and building paths that lead back to the basic of humanity. The central element crucial for the continued growth of mankind is one which focuses on mobilising human intellect and spirit.

"Only by bringing back that humanity and self-identity elements can organisations hope to compete in this digital century, which has been described by Lester Thurow as an era of man-made brain power industries," the Prime Minister said.

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