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MSC: Full steam ahead

MALAYSIA'S two top leaders have now made it abundantly clear that the development of the Multimedia Super Corridor, the linchpin to the country's further growth in the next millennium, will proceed unhindered despite measures to reduce the current account deficit. Firm statements emanating first from Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and then Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Tuesday put paid to any speculation that the project may be among those deferred.

There have been campaigns both within and outside the country, as the Information Ministry has confirmed, "to confuse the people by spreading news that the MSC will fail and is only a pipe-dream". Dr Mahathir's remarks at the Multimedia Asia conference clearly showed that he is not unaware of the scepticism about Malaysia's capacity to make the project a reality. The same disbelief emerged when Malaysia wanted to industrialise. "Many were sceptical saying that we could only grow rice. But now we can even grow crystals and cut them..." It was one hard slog grounded on sound policies and readiness to adapt that transformed the nation from an agricultural-based economy to an industrial one with manufacturing becoming the mainstay for its sustained economic growth over the last two decades. And now, acutely aware that in this Information Age, knowledge and ability to access the deluge of information are the keys to further national growth, it is imperative that a bold step be taken by launching the MSC.

It is not a piece of cake, as Dr Mahathir readily admitted. Most challenging of all obstacles is that Malaysia lacks the required technologies and the knowledge but "we are willing to work with others and to learn, and to learn fast." This indeed encapsulates the Malaysian experience which has made it a model to many with its economic success: Learning and doing.

It is a year on since Malaysia officially announced the MSC. Much water has flowed under the bridge with several ground-breaking events having taken place. Now that the country is well on the road to making the MSC a reality, Dr Mahathir took the opportunity of the conference to voice one of his greatest concerns. He strongly called on the international community to begin a dialogue towards formulating a new global framework for information age governance and towards nurturing a global civil society. Consistent with his advocacy of a World Century for global prosperity, he is much bothered by the widening knowledge gulf between the rich and powerful and the poor and weak nations. In this information age, the new basis for power, wealth and influence will be knowledge. At the moment, knowledge tends to be the preserve of the well-endowed and some even go to the extent of placing obstacles against others attaining it.

However, the world today is no longer polarised to "Us or You"; like it or not, it is "Us Together". In this rapidly-changing borderless world, if the international community values achieving its dream of global peace, nations must share information and knowledge and not leave everything to the free market system, which is interested only in the bottom-line and not social justice. Freedom can and must be combined with responsibility to fellow members of the world community.

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