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MSC, A SHINING EXAMPLE OF THOUGHT LEADERSHIP, SAYS LOTUS CHIEF

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 18 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's major information technology (IT) initiative through the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project is one of the best global examples of thought leadership, says Jeff Papows, president of Lotus Development Corporation.

Lotus, one of the world's top software companies, is a subsidiary of IBM Corporation.

"I think Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim ought to be given tremendous credit for being visionaries in this, which is much more in consistent with the characteristics of our (IT) industry," he said in an interview with Bernama.

The MSC, he said, demonstrated a shining example of the Malaysian government's thought leadership in trying to create a knowledge-based economy rather than a materials and goods economy on a tremendous scale.

"To me, the MSC is not about Cyberjaya or all kinds of very large physical structures. It's about knowledge and intellectual capital," he said.

Asked if Malaysia was a bit too late in entering the world of IT after the United States, some European countries, Japan, South Korea and India had made a headstart, he said, "I don't think you are late. It is never too late to invest in people."

Saying that he thought that Malaysia's timing of its entry was rather perfect, he said this because the business environment had lived in a computing paradigm based on Windows, CC++ and Intel-based chips for quite a while.

Although the world would continue to use such platforms to a substantial degree in the future, there has been a new paradigm based on Java, networks and the Internet, he said.

"I think if the next group of young Malaysian computer scientists can be invested in areas like groupware and Internet messaging, you can put in a lot of industry leaders participating here," he said.

Papows said Malaysia's strength lay in its ethnic, social and religious diversity and the MSC could be the gateway to many emerging markets.

Saying that there was absolutely no reason why Malaysia would not be able to succeed in the world of IT, he added that Lotus had shown its commitment by establishing its Asia-Pacific education centre in Malaysia because of the MSC initiative.

About 40 solutions engineers are also working on vertical solutions like banking, sales force automation and paperless government based on Lotus software technology.

"We're also working very closely with the universities here on knowledge management, on distant learning initiatives for virtual college campuses, which is another very new and exciting innovation," said Papows who also described their vice chancellors as being more advanced in their thinking than many in American universities.

He said Lotus was already exporting some of those software products developed with Malaysian expertise. For instance, work has been going on in Malaysia on some Java initiatives being concurrently done in 28 languages while the E-suite software had a lot of its original research done in the country.

"We are actually building products right here," he said, adding that

Malaysia is a logical place to invest and this is what Lotus has been doing over over the last couple of years.

Referring to the current economic downturn facing South East Asia, he said it was a temporary phase.

"I have seen this in Latin America and a lot of other places. Things have a way of turning around," he added.

"Our plan is continue to invest aggressively (in malaysia) in 1998. We are convinced that the economy would change (for the better) and I have got a lot of faith in the government," said Papows.

Talking on the US experience, he said the American economy was down in the dumps three years ago when many US managers were perceived of being fat and lazy while market valuations were down and the economy had a large deficit.

But three years down the road, the US economy made a turnaround and he said this has been largely due to substantial capital investments in IT where about 42 percent of the capital investments went to IT and computing upgrading.

He said, "Even in times of the greatest economic crisis, IT is not typically the place for innovative companies to curtail investments.

"This is because it is the very time that when the thought leaders, the innovative companies, have the opportunity to gain competitive advantage by investing ahead of their peers. So that when the economy turns around, they would be in a much more competitive position."

Papows, who is responsible for Lotus' financial and operational performance and for the execution of overall strategy, said it would be better for companies in Malaysia to face the economic crisis conceptually rather than emotionally.

"I have complete confidence in what you are doing here. You have got to guard against companies getting so intimidated by a lot of immediate news on the currency situation and preclude themselves from investing in IT," he said. -- BERNAMA

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