

18 JUN 1997

MSC'S CYBERJAYA SHOULD RELATE TO OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD, SAYS DOUGAN

By: Mohd Rizal Razalli & Noryani Ismail

KUALA LUMPUR, June 18 (Bernama) -- An adviser to the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) says opportunities from the Cyberjaya intelligent city in the MSC will be missing if it is looked only as a giant industrial park in Malaysia.

"It must be something that can relate many parts of the world," said Ambassador Diana Lady Dougan from the United States.

In an interview with Bernama, she said that in a recent talk, she referred to Malaysia's position as the single largest investor in South Africa and spoke of the opportunities in using the information technology networks (in the MSC).

These opportunities would be used as catalysts to reinforce the knowledge worker and activities in the manufacturing, services and other collaborative sectors between both countries, said Ambassador Dougan, who is a member of the International Advisory Panel of the MSC.

For the MSC, she said its total development is not just Cyberjaya, which is to be operated by four to five designated companies, but becoming a catalyst to other parts of the world.

Of the seven flagship applications in the MSC, she said telemedicine should be given priority.

She believed that telemedicine would give the most immediate impact is as it is very specific and collaborative like working on a particular disease or diagnosis.

On ways to attract more IT companies to set up operations in the MSC, Ambassador Dougan said the MSC itself has set a vision in a much broader sense, not just talking as an industrial park or the Silicon Valley of Asia.

"Let us presume, what will make the difference is the fulfilment of the commitment to a framework, which include guarantees and rights to seek opportunities within the MSC," she said.

She said she is aware of concerns about restrictions in Malaysia. But with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's commitment to focus on appropriate applications, this would enable the development of the MSC rather than controlling it.

This would also encourage the participating parties the willingness to work in a more collaborative way and in a borderless basis, she added.

Referring to successful passing of four Multimedia Bills to spearhead the MSC's development, Ambassador Dougan said Malaysia now faces the next momentous challenge -- to pass the Multimedia Convergence Bill.

As one of the pioneer and leading countries in the world to initiate the formation of convergence legislation, Malaysia has a hurdle in creating a benchmark for such cyberspace-centred laws to open more room and shed more light on the uncertainties of future technology developments.

"I think not so many countries are trying to develop a convergence law because it's too difficult and too complicated," said Ambassador Dougan.

"Thus, my recommendation is to make the law simple while focussed on the principles."

In definition, although convergence can be generally classified as a coming together of video, audio and data, it is in reality much more complex.

Convergence can be referred to as the provision of new services over existing infrastructure, development of new types of infrastructure and the

enhancement of existing services and technologies to provide new capabilities.

It can also be defined as the integration of technology, market or legal/regulatory capabilities which were previously separated structures.

This simply means that the users would have access to wide-ranging information, entertainment, communications, and transaction services via a single interface point.

Dougan stressed that for such a cyberlaw to be effective, the law-makers need to keep in mind the fact that technology, its applications and markets, are changing so quickly, thus it is important for the laws not to be too complex and too intrusive.

Therefore, Ambassador Dougan proposed that Malaysia establishes an independent regulatory commission agency to assist the government in overseeing the implementation of principles pertaining specifically in the Multimedia Convergence Law.

"The members of the independent commission need not be the experts from telecommunications and broadcasting sector, but they should be ones who could understand how does these convergence issue needs to be approached in a specific context," she said.

The Multimedia Convergence Bill, to be tabled in the next month's Parliamentary session, will deal with the convergence of function in the telecommunications industry as provider of telecommunications services, Internet networking and broadcasting.

Dougan, who is also the Senior Adviser of the centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC, said no country so far has come with a very effective convergence law.

"I think instead of going with what you have with the four cyberlaws- Computer Crime Act 1997, Digital Signature Act 1997, Telemedicine Act 1997, and Copyright (Amendment) Act 1997 that had gotten so many specifics, in the issue of the coming convergence laws, you should take a different approach," she added.

Rather than controlling the IT industry, the bills should be guided by a set of principles which would give solutions and facilitate the growth of the IT industry, she said.

Commenting on the issue of knowledge worker in the MSC, she said it is a global issue for all countries and had become a popular term.

The IT industry, which comes under the service sector, has been a major income for many countries with more wealth being created as compared to the manufacturing or agricultural sectors.

"I do not know exactly the ratio but of the newly industrialised or highly industrialised countries, half of them get more of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from this service sector, as compared to manufacturing and agricultural sectors," said Ambassador Dougan.

The penetration of IT systems is clearly spelt out in almost all economic activities. For example, the driving force behind manufacturing activities now is the Computer-Aided-Design (CAD) and Computer-Aided-Machine (CAM) IT systems.

"For instance, the design of the Boeing 777 airplane was done on-line between Seattle (in the US) and Bangalore, India," she said, adding this meant that knowledge workers could now live in many different parts of the world.

Ambassador Dougan reiterated that the total development of the MSC must first have the infrastructure in place, which is the technology, and secondly, the people and policies.

On Malaysia's recent commitment in the Information Technology Agreement (ITA) and Telecommunication Services Agreement (TSA) under the World Trade Organisation (WTO), she said the country would be a big beneficiary of both

agreements, especially with Malaysia's international status now as a leading manufacturer and exporter of telecommunication and electronic equipments.

"Malaysia will benefit greatly in the ITA agreement and the liberalisation resulting from it because undoubtedly, the country has more exports than imports in this (IT) industry," she added.

RIZ YI SHY