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PM: Hollywood could gain from MSC

Calvin Goh in Los Angeles

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday invited Beverly Hills entertainment and community leaders to collaborate with Malaysia to create the best environment to fulfil the promise of the Digital Age which it calls the Multimedia Super Corridor.

"The MSC could be the perfect place to experiment with creating the world's first multicultural content for digital entertainment in the Network World," he said.

The function was held at the Beverly Hills Hotel where the Prime Minister has been staying since his arrival on Sunday to lead Malaysia's five-day MSC promotional mission to the US undertaken by the Multimedia Development Corporation.

It was hosted by the Mayor of Beverly Hills Tom Levyn, the Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce and the Asian Society.

Dr Mahathir said the MSC would have the necessary infrastructure, laws and policies in what could be described as the cultural heart of Asia.

"We are a truly multicultural country where the Confucian, Islamic and Hindu cultures corresponding to the Chinese, Malay and Indian races thrive, remain separate yet somehow interact with each other.

"There is no better place to connect the amazing creativity of Hollywood with the condition necessary to localise digital entertainment relevant to much of Asia and the rest of the world," he said.

Dr Mahathir said while he believed many of the entertainment-related activities carried out in Los Angeles would change, "I think this will always be the creativity capital of the entertainment world".

"I believe one of the secrets of your success has been that you have been networked long before connectivity and networking became such big buzzwords," he said.

However, he felt things had moved very fast lately and that network needed to be more widespread.

"Today, all content creation is heavily concentrated within a 10-mile radius around this hotel. This is necessary when the network requires physical relationships and people to work with."

Noting that physical contact is now no longer necessary, he said: "We are already seeing movies, games and music that are largely or completely computer-generated. And computers can link up and work together without having to be near each other".

"I believe you will continue to be the major player in the IT age of computer-generated entertainment and its offspring, edutainment," he said.

However, he felt that maintaining their global dominance would probably require them to diversify some other elements of content creation to other cultural centres around the world.

Today's entertainment, he felt, was almost entirely American in its cultural content.

But as developing countries grew more affluent, they would want more local content for their entertainment because people anywhere identified with what they were entertained with and linked it with their own material aspirations.

"Later, as they become more secure through their success, they would be looking for deeper fulfilment," he said, adding that they were searching for meaning, and this required a cultural context that went well beyond America's pop culture.

Dr Mahathir felt that to stay globally dominant in the 21st century, digital entertainment leaders should be networked with multicultural content creation centres.

"The best results will come from combining the unique types of creativity found in such abundance in Hollywood and Beverly Hills with the stories, symbols, myths and personalities of each of the major world cultures," he said.

He added that in Asia, the major cultures grew out of Confucianism, Islam and Hinduism and each had a rich history that could provide new ideas for content.

Turning to the MSC, he said more than two years of careful study had gone into developing a package with four key elements that would make the environment within the MSC special.

* First, the MSC would have the best physical infrastructure that could be offered in the world. This includes the intelligent KLCC buildings, a new airport, rapid rail links to Kuala Lumpur, a Smart dedicated Highway, and two new intelligent garden cities - Putrajaya, the new administrative capital and Cyberjaya, a city designed to provide the physical and psychological spaces needed for productive contemplation and creativity in a relaxed atmosphere.

* Second, the MSC would have the world's soft infrastructure of supporting laws, policies and practices.

* Third, the MSC would leapfrog available information infrastructure with a 2.5-10 gigabit Open Multimedia Network that would use the latest ATM switches. This network would have a five gigabit international gateway with direct links to the US, Japan, Europe and other Asian and Asean countries. This would be operational by next year.

* Fourth, a fully dem-powered one-stop shop called the Multimedia Development Corporation had been created to manage and market the MSC. The MDC would be opening 10 offices around the world over the next two years so that it could be close to companies which would be its clients.

Dr Mahathir said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and he would personally oversee the activities of the MDC and would resolve issues brought to their attention.

He said that the MSC was a pilot project for harmonising "our entire country with the global forces shaping the Information Age."

"Phase 1 involves making the MSC a success by learning from our partners and from the experience we gain; Phase 2 will link up with other islands of excellence within Malaysia; Phase 3 involves making all of Malaysia a Multimedia Super Corridor that is connected to other smart-regions around the world.

"I expect Malaysia to be in the final phase by 2020 as we become a developed nation," he said.

To meet the needs of leading multimedia and entertainment companies, Malaysia is offering a 10-point Multimedia Bill of Guarantees.

The Government formally commits to all companies receiving MSC status from the MDC that:

* Malaysia will provide a world-class physical and information infrastructure;

* Malaysia will allow unrestricted hiring and entry of foreign knowledge workers in the MSC with no employment restrictions;

* Malaysia will ensure freedom of ownership of IT companies in the Corridor;

* Malaysia will allow freedom of sourcing capital globally for MSC infrastructure and freedom to borrow funds anywhere;

* Malaysia will provide competitive financial incentives including income tax exemption or an investment tax allowance for up to 10 years,

and no duties on the import of multimedia equipment;

* The MSC will become a regional leader in intellectual property protection and cyberlaws;

* Malaysia will ensure no censorship of Internet;

* The MSC will have globally competitive telecom tariffs;

* Malaysia will tender key MSC infrastructure contracts to leading companies willing to use the MSC as their regional hub; and

* Malaysia will provide a high-powered implementation agency to act as a one-stop shop to ensure the MSC meets the needs of the companies.

The MDC is registering interested companies and will be accepting formal applications from companies seeking MSC status in March.

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