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Propelling nation into IT centre of excellence (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced today the National Information Technology Agenda which will propel the nation into a centre of excellence for multimedia technology.

The Prime Minister said the agenda, themed "Turning Ripples Into Tidal Waves", would stress the need for a balanced development of three critical areas - people, infostructure and applications.

One of the most important tasks in the agenda, Dr Mahathir said, was the creation of the Multimedia Super Corridor.

"Among the things that we have to do in order to realise the effects of the Information Technology Agenda is to create a test bed, to determine whether we can actually apply information technology for the development of this country," he said after chairing the National IT Council at the Prime Minister's Department.

Dr Mahathir said as the administrative capital would lie within the MSC, the Government could use the opportunity to test whether IT could be applied in this area to the maximum.

"The MSC is one giant test bed for the information technology age. And in it will be found all the things we think will be required for a future modern society - a society which is very largely based on access to information by everyone and ease of communication not only within the area but also throughout the world.

"So we will provide this area with the necessary policies, the necessary practices, the necessary laws and the necessary physical infrastructure relating to IT.

"We will have a real Government functioning out of there. We will have facilities for research and development and education in the form of the Multimedia University."

Explaining the IT Agenda, NITC permanent secretary Tengku Datuk Mohd Azzman Shariffadeen said it was necessary due to the MSC's limited scope in terms of geography and national impact.

"There should be a wider programme, and that we have called the National Information Technology Agenda.

"It will see the nation achieving the features of a developed society as defined under Vision 2020. And to achieve that we have determined that we want to achieve a civil society, or if translated to Bahasa Malaysia, masyarakat madani.

"That civil society is fundamentally an empowered society, a participative society, an open society and a more democratic society. All of this comes about from having better information technology."

An aspect that is also important is the application of that technology.

The NITC has identified three key initiatives to drive the agenda. These are the IT programmes, the MSC and its flagship applications and demonstrator applications, which was also launched today.

These initiatives are being developed by the Multimedia Development Corporation.

The seven flagship applications are smart schools, multipurpose smart card, R&D cluster, electronic government, worldwide manufacturing web, \b borderless marketing and telemedicine.

The demonstrator applications programme is a key initiative to create IT awareness among the public and to promote its development in the country.

Demonstrator applications are small, focused and short-term projects

aimed at creating, developing and promoting new applications using IT and multimedia technology.

Anyone can participate in the programme. They may be local individual entrepreneurs, local private enterprises, public sector agencies, academia, non-profit organisations and non-governmental applications.

A five-member Technical Review Committee on Demonstrator Applications headed by Tengku Azzman, who is also chief executive of Mimos Bhd, has been set up.

Also announced today was the Multimedia Asia 1997 conference and exhibition on Sept 16, to be opened by Dr Mahathir.

Bearing the theme of "Moving MSC From Vision to Reality: Benchmarking Smart Solutions," the conference will discuss issues including those related to security, legal, social, commercial, change-related and environmental concerns.

The three-day event to be held at the Mines Resort is expected to attract about 300 conference participants and 146 exhibitors showcasing the best in international "smart applications" practices related to the MSC and the Smart Cities.

Its groundbreaking ceremony on May 17 would be attended by representatives of 29 leading-edge companies which had agreed to set up their operations in it, from a total of more than 900 enquiries.

They include Fujitsu, DHL, Mitsubishi, NCR, NEC, British Telecommunications, Reuter, Nortel, NTT, Siemens, Sumitomo, Sun Microsystems, Sharp, HCL, Telekom Malaysia, Sapura, Aims Worldwide, Permodalan Nasional Berhad, TV3, Alam Teknokrat, Renong Solutions, IOI Multimedia, CSA and Mimos.

"We are getting nine Malaysian companies and the rest are foreign. That is the present situation and we now have determined our agenda," he said.

Asked whether Malaysians could adapt to the IT era, Dr Mahathir said:

"I think the people of Malaysia have become very interested in the way information is going to spread in the future. And they react very intelligently - for example, to teleconferencing.

Dr Mahathir said the people should brace themselves for more changes in future some of which would be beyond control.

Asked whether special concessions would be given to Bumiputeras if the applications at the MSC were successful and expanded nationwide, Dr Mahathir said:

"Well, we are testing this and we are giving it special consideration. We have no quotas for Bumiputeras although it has been quite clear that there will be Bumiputera participation. On whether the setting up of the MSC would create a one country, two system situation, he said:

"Not exactly, but I must admit that this is a special area. As you know, even a free trade zone operates under a different law from the rest of the country. The general customs area has got a set of laws but a free trade area has a different set of laws.

THE NATIONAL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AGENDA: TURNING RIPPLES INTO WAVES.

* Provides an alternative economic structure to the present agricultural and industrial one as well as to carry the nation towards Vision 2020 and the creation of a Masyarakat Madani (civil society);

* provides a strategy for using IT to build and develop the nation;

* stresses the balanced development of three important, inter-related elements:

1) people - training individuals, groups and eventually society, through formal education or informal skills development, to deal with "smart" systems

2) infostructure - networks, affordable appliances and laws/regulations

3) applications - indigenous content development, interactivity,

enrichment systems like infotainment and edutainment

* Will succeed if its three key initiatives are successfully implemented:

1) IT programmes like the Multimedia Asia 1997 conference and exhibition from Sept 16 to 19

2) the MSC and its seven flagship applications (Smart Schools, Multipurpose Card, Research and Development Cluster, Electronic Government, Worldwide Manufacturing Web, Borderless Marketing, Telemedicine)

3) demonstrator applications - a bottom-up approach aiming to involve all Malaysians in the IT revolution by allowing communities outside the MSC to develop their own "mini-flagship" applications

* also needs the participation and co-operation of the Government, private sector as well as non-profit and non-governmental organisations to succeed.

* will be monitored and evaluated by the Knowledge Imperative Index and the Multicultural Index, both now being developed by the National IT Council and the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department.

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