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Rising worldwide interest to make MSC a reality

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LONDON, Sun: No other project initiated by Malaysia has caught the imagination nor raised so much discussions and interest as the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC).

The project was described as the "best and the boldest" by the Welsh Development Agency chairman David Rowe-Beddoe. Another chief executive officer said he was "extremely envious of Malaysia's Vision 2020" and a German CEO said at the way Malaysia is developing and forging ahead "in 10 years you have to give aid to Germany".

Malaysia may not be in a position to give aid to Germany in 10 years but Malaysia will certainly have progressed to a much higher level of development. An analysis by Caspian Securities says the "MSC is intended to quadruple per capita GDP output, and in doing so, propel Malaysia into the OECD fold.

"This will be done by creating a strong services industry that will steer the country away from its labour-intensive, low value-added manufacturing base and into the information age."

While the conventional manufacturing industries have helped Malaysia move up from its traditional agriculture and commodity-biased economy, the added push and momentum for further development will come from the services and Information Age industries.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who has been relentless in drumming up support for Malaysia and spoken out on behalf of developing countries, is now being admired by leaders of developed countries for conceiving the MSC and what it will stand for.

The German president, for example, related what he had heard from Dr Mahathir during his recent visit to Malaysia to his countrymen at home. The widespread interest was reflected in the attendance at the Imperial College here and the quality of questions raised not only by the CEOs of European companies but the Malaysian students as well.

"Everybody I meet from Hungary, Africa, Latin America, all of them want to know about the MSC. Some want to know how we could conceive such an idea," Dr Mahathir said at the end of his promotional tour of the MSC here.

Malaysians are also coming out of the shadows of their counterparts in the developed countries and are demonstrating their abilities in various fields including IT. World-class projects in IT are being encouraged into the MSC and one such project, with wide applications, was announced.

A plan to manufacture the world's first "e-pass wallet PC" within the MSC, for example, was unveiled. The memorandum of understanding for the e-pass was signed between Malaysian company TL Technology, E-pass International of London, a subsidiary of Xanadu plc, and Iris Securities.

The wallet PC or e-pass is a credit card-sized computer, small enough to fit into a wallet, which combines virtually limitless range of functions, such as credit cards, cashless payments, membership cards, access control and passport and vital health and personal data - all available via buttons and a display screen.

In time to come, citizens of the World Century will be carrying the e-pass from Malaysia in their wallets.

Many organisations and prominent individuals around the world have expressed interest in the e-pass, including Microsoft president Bill Gates who predicts that the wallet PC will begin to appear in a year's time.

Gates told a conference in Los Angeles last November that, "A wallet PC will be a pocket-sized computer with a snaphost-size colour screen that you will use instead for much of what you may carry around with you today - money and items that authenticate who you are, such as keys, identification, credit cards and tickets of various kinds, as well as items that provide you with mobile information and communications, such as a watch, newspapers or other reading material, address and appointment books, photographs, calculator, portable telephone and pager."

The MSC, a test bed for the world such as no other, will provide opportunities for knowledge workers and IT companies to try out new research unhindered. They will also be able to test their findings and apply them anywhere worldwide. Malaysia's gift to the world is its findings and its space is available to anyone from anywhere.

While the MSC is the first of its kind in the world and most of the things being planned for it have not been tried, Caspian Securities is confident it "will succeed". It points out that Malaysia has "an impressive" record of proven successes of projects. The track record of Government-sponsored projects shows success after success," it added.

Among the successful Malaysian projects listed are: Proton, which developed the national car; North-South Expressway; Measat; KL International Airport, and the development of Langkawi.

Among the other reasons for its confidence in the MSC are:

- \* The infrastructure, incentives and Government support will make the MSC one of the most attractive locations, worldwide, for high-tech companies to locate;

- \* The new stock exchange, Mesdaq, will allow smaller companies with no track record of profitability to raise capital and expand their operations. The ability to raise capital in Malaysia for ventures in the multimedia/IT business will secure the longer term future of the Corridor;

- \* In setting up a new government hub in Putrajaya, the Government will be the biggest user of IT in the MSC and will provide enormous market for IT companies located in the MSC;

- \* The Government's commitment to the MSC is embodied in the 10-point Bill of Guarantees; and

- \* The MSC has already received the endorsement of some of the world's leading IT CEOs. Bill Gates of Microsoft, Louis Gerstner of IBM, Larry Ellison of Oracle and Dr Lars Ramqvist of Ericsson are among those on the International Advisory Panel chaired by Dr Mahathir and some of them have also committed their companies to involvement in the MSC.

Undoubtedly for a project of this nature, which will break new ground, there are a number of unknown factors. Dr Mahathir acknowledged this, adding that this is precisely the reason why the 750 sq km test bed area is being created within the 15km and 50km corridor.

Various laws are being looked into including Cyberlaws which will be promulgated and amended to cater to the changing needs of the time.

An analyst pointed out that the project will succeed because Dr Mahathir is unlikely to stop challenging his countrymen and now the rest of the world. He has fired the imagination of the IT CEOs and they are excited about the project and have somewhere to go to test their "ideas" without worrying about hurdles and obstacles and numerous other restrictions.

The country's "Number One Salesman", who described himself as "a pusher", is unlikely to stop or be satisfied with the achievements thus far. He may be on leave for a about two months but he is unlikely to stop working and promoting the country and the MSC.

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